

THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION AT THE
BATTLE OF ANZIO-NETTUNO

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Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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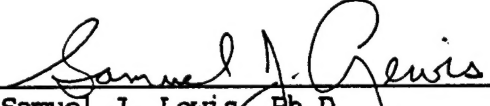
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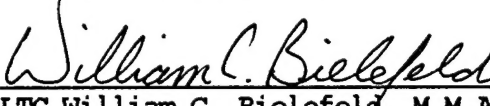
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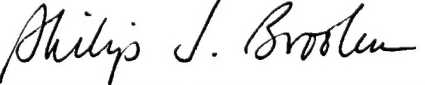
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ABSTRACT

THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION AT THE BATTLE OF ANZIO-NETTUNO, by LTC Gregory Allen Harding, USA, 181 pages.

This is a historical narrative of the Third Infantry Division's experiences at the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead from 22 January to 2 June 1944. It identifies major contributing factors to the Third Infantry Division's battlefield success at the battle of Anzio-Nettuno. The battle is broken down into five distinct stages and investigated in a chronological manner. Potentially significant factors are evaluated in each stage of the battle and include terrain, weather, Allied air superiority, and the quality of military intelligence available to the Third Infantry Division's commander. Also compared for each side are the quality of senior leadership, previous combat experience, the quality and quantity of manpower replacements, and available artillery resources.

This thesis concludes that the Third Infantry Division's battlefield success at Anzio-Nettuno appears to have been, to a large extent, a result of the quality and stability of the division's senior leadership, failures and missteps on the part of the higher German command echelons, the division's masterful employment of field artillery, and a highly effective training program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Allied invasion at Anzio-Nettuno on 22 January 1944 (Operation SHINGLE) remains one of the most controversial operations undertaken by the Allies during World War II. Much has been written on the subject by authors examining the American, British and German perspectives. Most of what has been written deals with questions at the strategic or operational levels of war; e.g., Was Operation SHINGLE necessary? Was the size of the invasion force too small to achieve the intended results? Was SHINGLE the US Fifth Army's main effort or a supporting attack? Why did General John Lucas (VI Corps commander) not advance on the Alban Hills when he had the chance? And, why did General Mark Clark (US Fifth Army commander) disregard General Sir Harold Alexander's (15th Army Group commander) desire for the VI Corps main effort to be directed toward Valmontone during the breakout from the beachhead in May 1944?

This study is intended to add to the body of knowledge of Operation SHINGLE at the tactical level. It seeks to, in a chronological pattern, answer the question "what were the major contributing factors to the Third Infantry Division's successes at Anzio-Nettuno from the initial assault in January 1944 through the breakout from the beachhead in May 1944?" Subordinate questions to be examined include: "What effect did senior leadership have upon the

division's operations?", "What effect did German units opposed to it have upon the division?" and "What effect did the division's previous combat experiences have upon it at Anzio?"

Little has been published to tell the story of Anzio-Nettuno at the tactical level. It is told in a single chapter of the Third Infantry Division's World War II history, and only a single chapter is included in the history of two of the division's regiments. The situation is similar for the Thirty Fourth and Forty Fifth Infantry Divisions, as well as the First Armored Division. Most of what has been written about the battle at the tactical level fails to analyze in detail the effects of leadership, weather, enemy forces, or previous unit experiences on the outcome. These factors obviously are critical to any understanding of what actually occurred. Why study the Third Infantry Division's experiences and not one of the other American divisions inside the beachhead? Of the five American divisions that attacked out of the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead in May 1944 (the Third Infantry, Thirty Fourth Infantry, Thirty Sixth Infantry, Forty Fifth Infantry, and First Armored), only the Third Infantry Division had been in the beachhead for virtually the entire battle. That, plus the fact that the division came through the battle with its impressive reputation as a fighting division further enhanced and finished the war as one of the truly outstanding divisions in the European Theater of Operations make it the logical choice for this study.

The methodology selected for this study involves the use of numerous primary (written and oral) and secondary sources as well as a terrain walk over the battlefield itself. Many of the numerous

secondary sources are used to provide a background setting at the strategic and operational levels for the research. Primary source documents originating from both the American and German sides are used to provide the majority of data detailing the day-to-day operations at the tactical level. These primary source documents have been augmented with personal interviews conducted by the author with former members of the Third Infantry Division during a terrain walk in June 1994 of the division's World War II route of advance in Italy.

This thesis is organized in a chronological manner. It begins by providing background material to identify the complex strategic and operational issues affecting Operation SHINGLE. The second chapter contains a discussion of the perceived/real need for an amphibious end run to cut German lines of communication between Rome and the Gustav Line, where the Fifth Army was stalled. It also addresses why Anzio-Nettuno was finally chosen as the objective versus where the Germans expected the invasion to come, i.e., beaches nearer Rome or farther north. The chapter presents extracts from a superb terrain analysis of the Anzio-Nettuno area prepared during the invasion planning by US Fifth Army engineers. It also includes a discussion of German pre-invasion preparations to include invasion alert plans, disposition of units and headquarters to the rear of the German Tenth Army and in the invasion area, as well as German beliefs regarding the expected timing and location of the anticipated assault. The chapter also introduces the Third Infantry Division of 22 January 1944. It examines the division's previous combat experiences in North Africa and Sicily as well as on the

Italian mainland, its special training in preparation for Anzio-Nettuno, and the division's senior leadership.

The next chapter of the study examines the Third Infantry Division's experiences during the initial assault and establishment of the beachhead against almost negligible German resistance. It discusses the magnitude of the Third Infantry Division's responsibilities on the VI Corps beachhead line regarding overall frontage, as well as the suitability of terrain in the division's portion of the beachhead for defense against German counterattacks. The D Day activities of the division are analyzed beginning with the landing of the division's assault battalions, the movement off the beach itself, the establishment of the initial beachhead line, and first attempts to expand the beachhead beyond the initial line. The initial German responses to the mission are also examined and analyzed.

In the next chapter, the study examines attempts by the division to expand its portion of the beachhead beginning on 24/25 January 1944, culminating with the failure to capture Cisterna and the shift to a defensive posture. It will discuss in depth the early attempts to infiltrate past German outposts and strongpoints at small unit level, and the eventual shift to large scale attacks using virtually the entire Third Infantry Division.

The violent German counterattacks which attempted to hurl the VI Corps back into the sea are the third phase of the battle to be studied. The Third Infantry Division's success in withstanding the very determined German counterattacks, pressed home violently in an attempt to destroy the beachhead, are discussed in detail. Field Marshal Albert

Kesselring's and General Eberhard von Mackensen's differing views on the plan to counterattack are examined in an attempt to identify potential contributing factors to the failure of both counterattacks.

Next, the study examines in detail the resulting stalemate, which lasted for approximately two and one-half months, until the final phase of the battle, the breakout. During the stalemate, the Germans never again seriously threatened the beachhead, yet the Third Infantry Division was not strong enough to crack the German ring around the beachhead, without external pressure by the US Fifth and British Eighth Armies in mid to late May. This study discusses changes in the Third Infantry Division's task organization and examines in detail highly specialized training for the upcoming breakout.

Finally, the division's breakout from the beachhead and advance to Valmontone are analyzed, beginning with the Third Division's capture of Cisterna. The advance to Cori and through the Velletri Gap to Ardena are examined in detail, as are the actions of the division's German opponents, the 362d and 715th Infantry Divisions. The climax of the breakout was the final battle before Valmontone between the Third Infantry Division and its old adversary, the Hermann Göring Panzer Division.

The thesis ends with conclusions regarding the significance of major factors contributing to the success of the Third Infantry Division at the battle of Anzio-Nettuno. Factors identified and discussed include the division's senior leadership, its masterful employment of field artillery, failures and missteps on the part of the German defenders, and procedures for ensuring highly trained and well-rested

soldiers prior to critical points in the battle. The role played by weather and air superiority on the Third Division's success are also discussed. Appropriate maps with overlays are included in the appendix.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Strategic and Geographic Overview

As dawn arrived at Anzio-Nettuno on 22 January 1944, high noon had come and gone for the Third Reich, but it was still to be fifteen and one-half terrible and bloody months before the nightmare ended. None of the soldiers of the Third Division assaulting across the beaches of Nettuno that morning knew this and many, in fact probably most, expected the war to be over much sooner.

What those Third Infantry Division soldiers did know, those who had been keeping up with the war news, was that on the eastern front the Germans had suffered a crushing defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943 and had suffered another terrible defeat at Kursk that July. Some of their leaders at division, corps, and army headquarters would have also known that the Russian summer offensive from July through November of 1943 had resulted in the liberation of Smolensk in September and the recapture of Kiev in November. The Russian winter offensive in the south began in December in the Pripet Swamp and along the Dnieper River, while in the north Novgorod was liberated and the siege of Leningrad lifted, both just days before Anzio-Nettuno.¹

In the west, the buildup for Operation OVERLORD continued. Although German U-boat sailors continued to fight desperately and valiantly, the Battle of the Atlantic had already reached its turning

point in May of 1943.² The line of communication between the United States and the United Kingdom would never again be seriously challenged during the war.

Over occupied Europe, the strategic bomber offensive was in high gear as decided at the Trident Conference between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Washington during May of 1943.³ Operation POINTBLANK, the around-the-clock combined British and American bomber offensive, had already introduced German citizens of Wilhelmshafen, Hamburg, Berlin, Schweinfurt, Regensburg, and many others, to the concept of total war during the summer and fall of 1943.⁴ While full of great promise from the Allied perspective, the strategic bombing campaign was proving problematic for not only the Germans, but for the Allies as well. Innovative German tactics and use of new technologies as well as predictable Allied tactics resulted in losses of Allied aircraft and air crews, which were unsustainable over the long term. No air force in the world could sustain indefinitely the casualty rates of the raids on Schweinfurt and Regensburg. As the Third Division prepared to conduct the amphibious assault at Anzio-Nettuno, the Allied air forces continued to improve their tactics and reduce their proportionate losses, while continuing to hit German targets. The Germans, however, were not accepting the status quo either. They continued to develop new tactics and weapons for their day and night fighters and were so effective in dispersing much of their industrial production capability that 1944 would actually see production go up from 1943 levels in many categories.

In the Mediterranean theater, the British Eighth Army captured the airfield at Foggia in late September 1943. This forward operational base allowed the Allied air forces to bomb southern Germany and the Rumanian oil fields at Ploesti more effectively than possible from North African bases.⁵ Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was proved devastatingly correct when he observed:

Enemy possession of the North African coast meant long-range bomber raids on southern Germany and opened up invasion possibilities at any point in the south of Europe. With every step the Allies advanced towards the north the conditions for an air war on southern Germany were improved.⁶

While things were progressing towards the American and British strategic goal of defeating Germany by January 1944, perhaps nowhere else were the British and American points of view on how to achieve that goal more visibly at odds than in the Mediterranean theater. The Italian campaign was a source of British/American friction dating from the closing days of the North African campaign. After the defeat of the Axis forces in North Africa, the Allies were faced with the problem of where to go next. The Allies had large numbers of troops committed to the Mediterranean theater in 1943 which, no matter how badly the Americans wanted, could not be employed in 1943 in France. These same troops could, however, be employed in Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, Italy, or the Balkans to pull German troops away from France (as well as the Russian Front) and to try to knock Italy from the war.⁷

The British perspective was born of hundreds of years opposing European continental powers. Most of the senior British leaders were survivors of the massive butchery of the First World War. Their personal and national history told them that to successfully defeat a

great continental power, such as Germany, they must build and manipulate alliances; subvert their weaker opponents, e.g., Italy; and attack their enemy by sea and air on the periphery until he was weakened sufficiently for the final blow.⁸ Those who had survived the slaughter of Ypres, the Somme, and Passchendaele and were now leading the British forces vowed they would not forget nor would they repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

The British obsession with the indirect approach, the "soft under-belly" as Churchill referred to it, placed the British at odds with the American strategic school of thought on how best to defeat Germany. While the British had agreed to Operation OVERLORD, the invasion of Normandy, they were not as keen to undertake it as promptly as were the Americans. Churchill wanted to attack through the Mediterranean and Balkans and, in conjunction with the Russian front, weaken the Germans so badly that their ability to successfully counter OVERLORD would be severely diminished.⁹ He was dissuaded from his desire to capture Rome and the island of Rhodes prior to OVERLORD by the Americans at the Cairo-Teheran conferences in November 1943.¹⁰

The American perspective, in keeping with the American way of war, held that the cross-Channel invasion into Normandy was the key to the defeat of Germany.¹¹ Many American leaders were not convinced of the wisdom of a continuation of the Italian campaign and sought ways to limit their Mediterranean operations, to husband resources for the decisive operation--OVERLORD.¹² President Roosevelt had been persuaded by Prime Minister Churchill at the Casablanca conference in January 1943 to postpone the cross-Channel invasion until 1944 in order to invade

Sicily. At the Cairo (Sextant) conference in November of 1943, the Americans made it clear to the British that they were unwilling to risk postponement of OVERLORD and ANVIL (invasion of southern France) simply for the prospect of capturing Rome. They got an agreement that the western Allies would "undertake nothing elsewhere that will jeopardize" OVERLORD and ANVIL.¹³

By January 1944 the Western Allies had run the Axis forces out of North Africa and had captured Sicily--Operation HUSKY (see map 1), thereby securing the shipping route through the Suez Canal and leading directly to the overthrow of Mussolini and the Italian decision to seek peace with the Allies.¹⁴ The Allies had crossed over onto the mainland of Italy from Messina and invaded at the bottom of the Italian Peninsula--Operations BAYTOWN and SLAPSTICK--as well as stormed ashore at Salerno--Operation AVALANCHE--, only to be nearly thrown back into the sea by determined German counterattacks. By the end of October 1943, it was obvious to the Allied leadership that Field Marshal Kesselring intended to fight the Allies every step of the way up the peninsula and make them pay in time and blood for every river crossed, every mountain top gained, every village captured.¹⁵ The Volturno River campaign of October-November 1943 and the Winter Line Campaign of November-December 1943 were devastating to the 15th Army Group (US Fifth Army and British Eighth Army). It was doomed to another bitter winter mountain campaign on the Gustav Line (see map 2), unless a means could be found to turn the Germans out of their defenses.¹⁶ The failed assaults at Cassino, the miserable winter weather, and pressure from

Churchill to end the stalemate resulted in a plan to cut the German lines of communication by means of an amphibious "end run."¹⁷

Churchill was almost beside himself as he watched the Italian Campaign bog down into a sideshow where the goal was to tie down as many German units as possible from other fronts, e.g., Russian front as well as the Norman coast, while consuming a bare minimum of Allied resources.¹⁸ The amphibious "end run," which came to be known as Operation SHINGLE, appeared as a way to salvage the Italian campaign. In December 1943, he wrote President Roosevelt, "At a single blow SHINGLE will decide the battle of Rome and possibly achieve destruction of a substantial part of the enemy's army."¹⁹ The wording and tone suggest an effort to allay any fears or doubts of the American president regarding SHINGLE's effect upon the timetable for OVERLORD. Perhaps a more insightful glimpse of Churchill's attitude was "I am deeply conscious of the importance of this battle, without which the campaign in Italy will be regarded as having petered out ingloriously."²⁰

As the soldiers of the Third Division moved across the beaches at Nettuno on 22 January, their Fifth (US) Army and Eighth (British) Army comrades were still stalled to the east in front of the first major defensive line established by the Germans, the Gustav Line. It ran from the Gulf of Gaeta near Minturno on the Tyrrhenian coast along the Garigliano River to Cassino at Mount Cairo and then across the mountains to the Adriatic coast near Ortona (see map 3). During the early planning for Operation SHINGLE, planners had suggested that Allied forces should be in positions along a line drawn from Priverno in the south (near the rail line from Naples to Rome) through Ferentino (on

Highway 6 near the Sacco River) and to Capistrello (on a rail line from Naples just south of the intersection with Highway 5 at Avezzano) prior to the amphibious operation. From these positions, it was believed they would be able to support the landings at Anzio-Nettuno (a distance of approximately twenty-five miles from Priverno to the original beachhead line). When Operation SHINGLE began, the Fifth Army was still approximately thirty miles short of the Priverno-Ferentino-Capistrello line and hence, in no position to support Third Division.²¹

Why then Anzio-Nettuno and not some other beach nearer the Fifth Army? The choice of suitable beaches to put an appropriate size force ashore between the Gustav line and Rome was limited. Besides Anzio-Nettuno, there were very few others that met the requirements of the Allied planners.²² Anzio-Nettuno lay approximately thirty miles due south of the outskirts of Rome and was within striking distance of the Colli Laziali (Alban Hills). As such, it could allow the Allies to cut the German lines of communication (notably Highway 6) between Rome and the right flank of the Tenth (German) Army opposing the main body of the Fifth Army.²³ It was hoped that this threat to cut their lines of communication, as well as the pressure created by a Fifth Army offensive to breach the Gustav Line and draw in the German reserves (see maps 4 and 5), could result in the Germans being turned out of the last major defensive line between the 15th Army Group and Rome.²⁴

Terrain

The Colli Laziali, or Alban hills, were to become a source of much confusion between the commanders of the 15th Army Group, the Fifth

Army, and the VI (US) Corps. All agreed that these volcanic hills which lay approximately twenty miles due north of Anzio-Nettuno and which rose to heights of near 3,000 feet were critical terrain for SHINGLE.²⁵ Possession of this terrain would allow the Allies to dominate the approaches to Rome from the south and southeast and to effectively deny use of Highways 6 and 7 to the Germans on the Gustav Line for communications with Rome (see map 6). Possession by the Germans could effectively deny Rome to the Allies from the southern avenue of approach as well as provide excellent observation of the beachhead during efforts to destroy or contain it. While all the Allied commanders understood the necessity to capture the Colli Laziali, confusion arose over the matter of timing of the capture, i.e., how soon after the initial assault.

While not astride the most direct avenues of approach from the beachhead to Rome as were the Colli Laziali, the Lepini Mountains were also key terrain for both the Allied invaders and the German defenders. These mountains, which were separated from the Colli Laziali by the three-mile wide Velletri-Valmontone saddle, ran generally from northwest to southeast. Monte Lupone (4,478 feet) was one of the more significant peaks in the immediate vicinity of the beachhead and, as with the Colli Laziali, provided almost perfect observation of the beachhead, weather permitting. During the breakout from the beachhead toward Valmontone in May 1944, the Third Division encountered some of its strongest resistance as a direct result of enemy observation and flanking fires from positions in the Lepini Mountains.²⁶

The Pontine Marshes extend for a distance of approximately forty miles and a width of approximately twelve miles in the coastal region from the Incastro River to Terracina, bounded on the north by the Colli Laziali and on the east by the limestone Lepini Mountains.²⁷ The land to the north and east of Anzio-Nettuno was, for the most part, reclaimed marshland. The Anzio plain merges with the Pontine Marshes southeast of Anzio. Much of the area within the beachhead was passable enough in dry weather, as long as the numerous drainage ditches and pumping station(s) were functioning properly. When the rains came, as they frequently did, the drainage system could not handle the high water table (within two feet of the surface) and foxholes and bunkers filled up with water and the fields became so soft that most vehicles became virtually road bound.²⁸

The left flank of the beachhead, the British sector, relied on the Moletta River to anchor the defense to the Tyrrhenian Sea.²⁹ This portion of the beachhead included numerous wadis (deep stream gullies with banks as high as fifty feet) leading westward to the sea.³⁰ These wadis provided numerous avenues of approach for dismounted troops as well as numerous potential ambush sites for both German and Allied infantrymen. In this sector, the Anzio plain breaks from the Pontine Marshes, and rolling fields and woodlands extend to the Tiber River.³¹

The right flank of the beachhead, initially held by the reinforced Third Division, was anchored on the Mussolini Canal (see map 7). This key feature was a significant obstacle for tanks, both German and American, a far cry from its original purpose of draining a part of the Pontine Marshes. The canal met the Tyrrhenian Sea approximately

nine miles east of Nettuno. It headed due north for about six miles before branching near Sessano. The beachhead line followed the canal from the sea to this intersection and then followed the western fork to the vicinity of Padiglione.³²

At approximately sixty meters in width (at the top) and approximately sixteen feet deep,³³ the canal truly canalized any attacking armor to one or more of the fourteen bridges across the canal in the Third Division sector.³⁴ In addition to providing cover and concealment for defending infantrymen as well as antitank defense, the canal served at least one other interesting function. German pilots used the canal as a ground reference point during their bombing and strafing runs on Allied troops in an attempt to prevent fratricide.³⁵

Within the beachhead, the only two built-up areas that could legitimately be called towns were the seashore resorts of Anzio and Nettuno. Scattered throughout the Third Division's sector were numerous small clusters of buildings with names such as Acciarella, Conca (Borgo Montello), Le Ferriere, Campomorto, Carano, and Femina-Morta (Isola Bella).

Beyond the beachhead, key areas of interest to the Third Division included the small towns/villages of Littoria on the far bank of the Mussolini Canal to the east, Cisterna (one of the early Third Division objectives) to the north east of Nettuno, Cori on the slopes of the Lepini Mountains, Velletri due north of Nettuno and at the southeastern base of the Colli Laziali, and Valmontone astride Highway 6 in the Sacco River valley to the east of the Colli Laziali.

Throughout the beachhead, numerous two-story farm houses (podere), constructed of plastered stone,³⁶ were used by infantrymen of both sides for cover and concealment as well as for observation posts and defensive positions. It was not uncommon for these podere to change hands frequently as Americans slipped in at dusk and left before dawn only to have Germans occupy the same house during the day and vice versa.

Although the road network within the beachhead was somewhat dense, the only paved road within the Third Division sector was the double lane from Nettuno to Cisterna (approximately seventeen miles northeast) (see map 7).³⁷ The division would eventually follow this route during the breakout in May to Valmontone on Highway 6 via Cori and Artena.

Another road ran from Nettuno to Littoria in the east on the far side of the Mussolini Canal and intersected with Highway 7, a short distance later. The other major road within the beachhead did not lay within the Third Infantry Division sector. It ran from Anzio to Aprilia and Campoleone enroute to Albano (approximately eighteen miles inland) on the southern slope of the Colli Laziali.³⁸

The main railroad on the western side of the peninsula (Rome to Naples) ran from northwest to southeast across the Third Division's frontage and crossed Highway 7 near Cisterna (see map 7). This electrified, double-track, standard-gauge railroad served as an obstacle to the division during the fighting near Cisterna.³⁹

The only railroad in the beachhead proper was an electrified, single-track, standard-gauge line from Anzio-Nettuno which ran near Aprilia to intersect the main Rome-Naples line near Campoleone.⁴⁰

Cover and concealment were hard to come by within the beachhead. Northeast of Anzio-Nettuno, the Padiglione Woods and Nettuno Woods provided concealment and limited cover for logistics and support units as well as for the occasional front-line unit rotated off the line for training and rest.⁴¹ Further to the west, along the Anzio-Aprilia road, a reforestation project provided a dense pine forest for concealment.⁴² Otherwise, vegetation was generally lacking within the beachhead, especially during the winter months.

Within the beachhead, the ground was flat or very gently rolling, broken only by ravines, gullies, and drainage ditches. These breaks in the ground along with the podere provided the only cover and concealment available to the front-line infantryman short of his foxhole or bunker. In the Third Division sector, on the line where the close combat occurred, excellent fields of fire were available for both Americans and Germans due to the sparseness of the vegetation.⁴³

Lying between the Third Division front line (generally along the western branch of the Mussolini Canal) and the town of Cisterna was a series of drainage ditches. The ditches varied in size (some as large as thirty feet in width and twenty feet in depth) and presented a major obstacle to an off-road advance from the beachhead toward Cisterna.⁴⁴ North of the Rome-Naples railroad in the vicinity of Cisterna the ground became more broken and cultivated fields, vineyards, and olive trees were to be found.⁴⁵

German Pre-Invasion Preparations

The Germans, both OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces) and Army Group C, expected the Allies to conduct an amphibious operation to break the stalemate on the Gustav Line. To the Germans, the Allies appeared almost lock step in their methodology. Their amphibious operations in North Africa, Sicily, and southern Italy, were so numerous as to be almost predictable in circumstances such as those facing them along the Gustav Line. Field Marshal Kesselring stated that he would have tried an amphibious operation were he in the Allies' position.⁴⁶

What the Germans did not know was where or when the Allies would strike and in what strength. As early as December 1943, OKW and Army Group C began to seriously develop contingency plans to counter the expected invasion.⁴⁷ Both headquarters developed precisely detailed plans for all likely invasion sites. OKW developed plan MARDER I to counter a landing on the west coast of Italy and plan MARDER II for a landing on the east coast.⁴⁸ OKW plans called for motorized infantry and jäger (light infantry) divisions to be sent from France, the Balkans, and Northern Italy/Germany to help counter the expected landing.⁴⁹

The Army Group C staff developed at least five contingency plans to correspond with likely/possible landing sites (see map 8).⁵⁰ These plans were incredibly detailed and included not only unit designations with routes of march and timetables, but also unit responsibilities for clearing mountain passes of ice along march routes and placement of directional signs.⁵¹ The planning was so precise that all that was required to place each of the plans into action was the broadcast of the

appropriate code word.⁵² For a landing at Anzio-Nettuno, the code word was "RICHARD."

In addition to contingency plans to rapidly seal off any beachhead with mobile forces from OKW and Army Group C, the Germans made defensive preparations along the coast at potential landing sites they felt were most likely. Field Marshal Kesselring believed the Allies would attempt a turning movement north of Rome with the Tenth Army as its target.⁵³ He expected this operation to be conducted in conjunction with an Allied offensive along the Gustav Line.⁵⁴ However, the Germans emplaced minefields and constructed fortifications as far south as the Golfo di Gaeta as well as near the mouth of the Tiber River at Lido di Roma.⁵⁵

Although OKW expected the invasion to occur in the spring,⁵⁶ Field Marshal Kesselring had a hunch that it might begin on or about 20 January 1944. He placed German troops throughout Italy on invasion alert for three nights beginning the evening of 18-19 January. At the urgings of his staff and subordinate commanders who argued the alert was wearing out the troops, he stood the troops down from the alert the evening of 21-22 January.⁵⁷

The Allied commanders expected the Germans to have contingency plans to deal with a landing behind the Gustav Line. What the Allies did not expect was the speed and strength with which the Germans planned to advance upon and seal off the beachhead. Upon achieving almost complete tactical surprise at Anzio-Nettuno, Allied commanders expected the Germans to respond with a methodical buildup of numerous division or regimental sized units against the beachhead as they fell back off the

Gustav Line or as Field Marshal Kesselring employed his mobile reserves. The Allied commanders did not expect the Germans to employ reconnaissance units and other small, highly mobile units to advance against the beachhead within hours to buy time for the main German forces to move up.⁵⁸

VI (US) Corps Mission

The VI (US) Corps mission for Operation SHINGLE was to land at 0200 on D Day on the beaches in the vicinity of ANZIO, to seize and secure a beachhead, and to be prepared to advance inland in the direction of the COLLI LAZIALI (Alban Hills).⁵⁹ This seemingly straight forward mission statement was in compliance with the Fifth Army commander's intent and, to the novice, might appear also to comply with the 15th Army Group commander's intent. However, it did not.

The key problem with the VI (US) Corps mission statement was the wording "be prepared to adv inland direction vic COLLI LAZIALI."⁶⁰ It was General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander's intent that, once VI (US) Corps had secured a beachhead, General John P. Lucas push rapidly to the Colli Laziali with patrols and light forces of approximately regimental size.⁶¹ Most indications are that General Alexander recognized this for what it was, a highly risky bluff. Nevertheless, he saw the Colli Laziali as key terrain for the objective of cutting the main German lines of communication (Highways 6 and 7) between Rome and their right flank on the Gustav Line.⁶² He certainly intended that VI (US) Corps capture the Colli Laziali, as this was a specified mission for VI (US) Corps in the 15th Army Group order.⁶³ The disconnect between the VI

(US) Corps mission statement and the 15th Army Group commander's intent might have been avoided when General Alexander issued his SHINGLE directive on 12 January, had he made his intentions more clear. He did not and General Mark W. Clark and his Fifth Army staff saw fit to not seek clarification, but to apply their own interpretation.⁶⁴

The Fifth Army order for SHINGLE directed VI (US) Corps:

- a) To seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio.
- b) Advance on Colli Laziali.⁶⁵

The Fifth Army's wording "Advance on Colli Laziali" and "be prepared to adv inland vic COLLI LAZIALI" as stated in the VI (US) Corps plan did not carry the same implications or convey the same intent as the 15th Army Group order "capture the Colli Laziali."⁶⁶ General Clark's choice of wording for his order to VI (US) Corps was intentional. It was designed to allow General Lucas a great deal of latitude regarding the timing of any advance from the beachhead.

In a somewhat unusual situation that served to reinforce the disconnect between the 15th Army Group commander's intent and the guidance provided to VI (US) Corps by the Fifth Army, General Brann (Fifth Army G3) personally briefed General Lucas on the Fifth Army operation plan. During their discussion, General Brann emphasized to General Lucas that VI (US) Corps' primary mission was to seize and secure a beachhead.⁶⁷

Other American Units at Anzio-Nettuno

In addition to the Third Infantry Division, three other American divisions (the Forty-Fifth Infantry, First Armored, and Thirty-Fourth Infantry) fought within the beachhead and an additional division (the

Thirty-Sixth Infantry) landed in time to participate in the May 1944 breakout.

The Forty-Fifth Infantry Division, a federalized National Guard (Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico) unit, was commanded at Anzio-Nettuno by General William W. Eagles (a former Third Infantry Division Assistant Division Commander). The division had participated in the VII Corps Texas maneuvers as well as the Louisiana Maneuvers prior to deployment overseas and had fought with distinction in Sicily and at Salerno.⁶⁸

The First Armored Division was commanded by General Ernest N. Harmon when the division minus Combat Command B (CCB) came ashore at Anzio-Nettuno during the early days of the operation. Prior to deploying overseas, the division took part in the Second Army Louisiana Maneuvers and the First Army Carolina Maneuvers. Elements of the division fought numerous battles in North Africa. The division next saw combat along the Rapido River in mid-December 1943.⁶⁹

The Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division, another federalized National Guard (Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota) unit, was under the command of General Charles W. Ryder. This unit participated in the V Corps Louisiana Maneuvers and had seen action in Tunisia, at the Volturno River, the Winter Line, and the Gustav Line. The division came ashore at Anzio-Nettuno on 25 March 1944.⁷⁰

The Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division, yet another federalized National Guard division (Texas), was commanded by General Fred L. Walker (a former battalion commander in the Third Division during World War I). The division took part in the VIII Corps Texas Maneuvers as well as

Louisiana Maneuvers prior to its amphibious assault at Salerno on 9 September 1943. The division saw action at the Mignano Gap and along the Rapido River during the winter of 1943-44. It landed at Anzio-Nettuno on 22 May 1944 to take part in the breakout from the beachhead.⁷¹

Other key American units within the beachhead included the combined American-Canadian First Special Service Force, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and the 6615th Ranger Force (Provisional).

The First Special Service Force (SSF) was commanded by General Robert T. Frederick. This unit had received extensive training in skiing, mountaineering, airborne operations, and small-unit close combat prior to its initial employment during the invasion of the Aleutian Islands and subsequent deployment to the Mediterranean Theater, where it quickly established a reputation for itself with the Fifth Army commander as a unit that could get the tough missions accomplished. The First Special Service Force came ashore at Anzio-Nettuno on 2 February 1944 and went into the line on the VI Corps right flank along the Mussolini Canal.⁷²

The 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment was commanded by Colonel R. H. Tucker. The regiment's combat experience included the assaults of Sicily and at Salerno. The paratroopers came ashore at Anzio-Nettuno on D-day 22 January 1944 and fought within the beachhead until early April 1944, when the unit was pulled out to return to England to rejoin their parent unit, the 82d Airborne Division, to prepare for Operation OVERLORD.⁷³

The 6615th Ranger Force (Provisional) was commanded by Colonel William O. Darby. It included the 1st, 3d, and 4th Ranger Infantry Battalions as well as the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion, and a 75-mm cannon company. Elements of the force had seen action in North Africa and Sicily and the force saw action as a unit at Salerno and the drive to and on the Winter Line.⁷⁴

German units opposing Third Infantry Division at Anzio-Nettuno

During its fight in the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead from January through May of 1944, the Third Infantry Division fought elements of many different German divisions. Opponents included units from the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions as well as the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Reichsführer SS."

The I Parachute Corps, which had been formed in central Italy in early 1944,⁷⁵ controlled the early German containment of the beachhead until the Fourteenth Army and the LXXVI Panzer Corps arrived. The I Parachute Corps was commanded by General Alfred Schlemm, a Luftwaffe general who had worked as a planner for the invasion of Crete on General Kurt Student's staff.⁷⁶

The Fourteenth Army took control of the German response to Operation SHINGLE at 1800 hours on 25 January 1944.⁷⁷ This army had been disbanded in late 1939 and reformed in the autumn of 1943 in northern Italy.⁷⁸ It was commanded by General Eberhard von Mackensen, a decorated veteran of the Russian front and the son of Field Marshal von Mackensen.⁷⁹

The LXXVI Panzer Corps, commanded by General Traugott Herr, had been formed in the summer of 1943 in Italy⁸⁰ and had seen action against the British Eighth Army. General Herr had been decorated for actions on the Russian front.⁸¹ Upon its arrival at the beachhead on 4 February, LXXVI Corps would be responsible to Fourteenth Army for the eastern sector of the beachhead while the I Parachute Corps retained responsibility for the western sector. As a result of its responsibility for the German sector of the beachhead opposite the Third Infantry Division's positions, the LXXVI Panzer Corps served as higher headquarters for the divisions opposing the Third Division and reported directly to Fourteenth Army.

Of the many German units which opposed the Third Infantry Division during its four months in the beachhead, the divisions which most frequently appeared were the Hermann Göring Parachute-Panzer Division (HG Pz Div), the 26th Panzer Division, the 71st Infantry Division, the 362d Infantry Division, and the 715th Infantry Division.

Both the Third Infantry Division and the HG Pz Div had seen combat in Sicily and in the fight north of Salerno. Elements of the HG Pz Div (Battle Group Mauke) fought the Third Division during its crossing of the Volturno River near the Triflisco Gap (see map 9).⁸² The HG Pz Div brought a fine reputation to the confrontation. A Luftwaffe unit, it was comprised solely of volunteers and received priority in equipment and personnel as a result of interest taken by Hermann Göring himself. Elements of the division were destroyed in Tunisia in 1943. The division was rebuilt in time to participate in the defense of Sicily, where its poor performance near Gela (minus Battle

Group Schmalz) against the Americans infuriated the division commander, General Paul Conrath. As a result, he relieved some of his subordinate commanders in an effort to overcome what Conrath perceived as timidity on their part. Conrath had been decorated for actions on the Russian front in 1941 and again in August 1943 for actions in Sicily.⁸³ He remained in command of the HG Pz Div for most of the duration of the fighting at Anzio-Nettuno until 16 April 1944 when command was assumed by General Schmalz,⁸⁴ who likewise had been decorated for actions in Sicily and in France in 1940.⁸⁵

The other armored unit which opposed the Third Infantry Division at the beachhead was the 26th Panzer Division. This unit had a reputation as one of the finest German divisions in Italy and quite possibly the finest heavy German division in theater. It had begun the war as the 23d Infantry Division and saw combat in Poland, France, and Russia (where it sustained heavy casualties) prior to being withdrawn from the front and sent to France in the summer of 1942 for redesignation as the 26th Panzer Division and training. Arriving in Italy during the summer of 1943, the division spent the rest of the war fighting back up the peninsula until it finally ceased to exist near the Po River in the spring of 1945.⁸⁶ The 26th Panzer was commanded at Anzio-Nettuno by General Freiherr Smilo von Lüttwitz, decorated in 1942 for actions in Russia.⁸⁷

The 71st Infantry Division was a new division, formed in Denmark in April of 1943 and bearing the name of an earlier 71st Infantry Division which had been destroyed at Stalingrad. Fortunately for the Third Infantry Division, the new 71st Infantry was seeing its

first major combat at Anzio-Nettuno under the command of General Wilhelm Raapke, although it is likely the division had seen combat in an anti-partisan role during its time in Istria during 1943.⁸⁸

Formed in northern Italy in late 1943, the 362d Infantry Division saw its first combat against the Allied beachhead at Anzio-Nettuno. Although the division was new and inexperienced, its commander, General Heinz Greiner⁸⁹ was an experienced combat commander, having commanded an infantry division in Russia.⁹⁰

The 715th Infantry Division, a partly motorized unit,⁹¹ had originally been organized in 1941 as a static infantry division and saw service in southwest France and in a coast defense role along the French Mediterranean coast until early January 1944.⁹² Its first major combat was at Anzio-Nettuno. The division was commanded at the beachhead by General Hans Georg Hildebrandt,⁹³ a veteran of the German Africa Corps where he briefly commanded the 21st Panzer Division as a Colonel from January 1943 through most of April until placed on sick leave.⁹⁴

Third Infantry Division

Previous Combat Experience

Prior to Operation SHINGLE, the Third Infantry Division had participated in the invasion of North Africa--Operation TORCH--and the assault on Sicily--Operation HUSKY--as well as participating in intense combat on the Italian mainland. The division had already earned a reputation within the US Army, as well as the German Army, as a first rate unit. Its baptism of fire came on 8 November 1942 against light resistance during the assault at Fedala (near Casablanca) in French

Morocco.⁹⁵ The Third Division's first major combat against stiff resistance started on 10 July 1943, when it assaulted Sicily as the major unit of the Seventh Army's JOSS FORCE (Third Infantry Division, Combat Command A of Second Armored Division, and 3d Ranger Battalion). The dog face soldiers were key players in the capture of Palermo and Messina.⁹⁶ Coming ashore onto the mainland through the Salerno beachhead, the Third Division led the way for the Fifth Army across the Volturno River and continued to grind forward against determined German resistance, finally coming to a halt against the Winter Line in the vicinity of the Mignano Gap.⁹⁷

Leadership

The soldiers of the Third Infantry Division were truly blessed by having two of the finest combat commanders in the US Army as their division commanders. Major General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. came to the division on 8 March 1943 with impeccable credentials. Not only had General Truscott seen action during the Dieppe operation, he had earned a Distinguished Service Medal for his battlefield leadership and planning/organizational skills, while in command of sub-task force "Goal Post" of the Western Task Force during Operation TORCH. General Truscott next served as a field deputy to General Eisenhower at his advanced command post for the Tunesian front. After preparing his division for Operation HUSKY, General Truscott led it in such a manner that his actions and those of the division earned him a Distinguished Service Cross.⁹⁸

The division's assistant division commander during most of its early campaigning, Brigadier General William W. Eagles, left the Third Infantry Division in mid-November 1943 to assume command of another fine division, the Forty-Fifth Infantry. The new assistant division commander, Brigadier General John W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel arrived in time to lend his expertise to the division as it trained for the Anzio-Nettuno operation.⁹⁹ General O'Daniel had succeeded General Mark Clark in command of Company K, 11th Infantry Regiment in the Argonne during WWI and earned a Distinguished Service Cross. He had also been in charge of amphibious and commando training at Ground Force Headquarters in Washington, D.C.¹⁰⁰ General O'Daniel also saw combat with the Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division at the Salerno beachhead.

Previous Training

The Third Infantry Division's training for Operation SHINGLE was basically a refinement of the division's training for its landing in Sicily. Much had been learned in the fourteen months since the TORCH landings. The division that established the beachhead at Anzio-Nettuno was more highly trained and disciplined than the division which had come ashore at Fedala. While the men had always been sound, what had changed dramatically was the division senior leadership's knowledge and understanding of the physical and psychological preparation of men for battle. When General Truscott took command of the Third Infantry Division, he already held the belief that physical and training standards for the infantry were too low. Based upon his observations of American rangers successfully undergoing British Commando training,¹⁰¹

within a week of taking command, he established high, yet attainable, standards for not only the infantrymen, but for all men of the Third Division.¹⁰² The results were a dramatic upswing in morale and esprit de corps.¹⁰³

The aspect of physical training which produced the most immediate change of attitude within the division was what came to be known as the "Truscott Trot," or speed marching. At that time, the army standard for infantry required it to march at two and one-half miles per hour. Much to the initial consternation of his G3, General Truscott established higher standards for the Third Division. Before the division's landing on Sicily, near the end of its training in North Africa, each infantry battalion was able to speed march at a rate of five miles in one hour, four miles per hour for up to twenty miles, and three and one-half miles per hour for up to thirty miles!¹⁰⁴ On Sicily, the intense physical training paid off. Prior to its attack near San Stefano, the 3d Battalion of the 30th Infantry advanced over treacherous terrain in extremes of temperature wearing full combat load for fifty-four miles in thirty-three hours and moved immediately into the attack.¹⁰⁵ During the Third's training for Operation SHINGLE, the division cadre introduced the Truscott Trot to the new soldiers who had joined the division after North Africa.

In North Africa prior to HUSKY, and near Salerno prior to SHINGLE, men of the Third Division received extensive training. The physical training, in addition to speed marching, included obstacle courses, log tossing, calisthenics, rope climbing, bayonet and battle courses, as well as hand-to-hand combat.¹⁰⁶ More specialized training,

oriented toward the division's mission, included waterproofing of vehicles and equipment, reduction of pillboxes and beach obstacles, mountain warfare, night operations, and antitank and antiaircraft firing.¹⁰⁷ General Truscott's experiences with the commandos at Dieppe, as well as his observation of American soldiers in other units in Tunisia, served the Third Division well, as he meticulously developed a training program second to none, built on the successes and failures of others.

An additional aspect of training, not unique to the Third Infantry Division but practiced at an extraordinary level of professionalism by the division, was the indoctrination of replacements in what it meant to be a member of the Third Division.¹⁰⁸ Prior to its movement from Sicily to the Salerno beachhead, the division received replacements from the First and Ninth Infantry Divisions.¹⁰⁹ The veteran officers and non-commissioned officers of the Third took very seriously their responsibility to make all new replacements to the division members of the Third Division team, regardless of whether the replacement was straight out of basic training or a seasoned veteran from another division. Units within the Third Infantry Division conducted extensive professional development classes for both officer and non-commissioned officer replacements during November and December of 1943 near Pietravairano.¹¹⁰

On 28 December 1943, General Truscott's division moved to a training area at Pozzuoli (near Naples) to undergo an intensive program of amphibious assault training.¹¹¹ The division needed this training for SHINGLE because a significant number of the men were replacements

who had joined the division after the landings at French Morocco and Sicily. Casualties within the company grade officer ranks had caused a 115 percent turnover in platoon leaders within the division since the invasion of North Africa.¹¹² Third Infantry Division non-commissioned officer losses had also been extremely heavy. The division desperately needed a dress rehearsal for SHINGLE, as did the naval forces. Incredible as it may seem, General Truscott found it extremely difficult to convince the higher echelons of the necessity for a rehearsal. The VI Corps landing exercise WEBFOOT, conducted south of Salerno 17-19 January 1944, proved General Truscott right.¹¹³ Naval forces launched amphibious DUKWs carrying the 41st Field Artillery's 105 mm howitzers into rough seas too far from shore with the result that the battalion lost all of its howitzers as the DUKWs sank. The 41st went into action at Anzio-Nettuno with 105 mm howitzers which had been pulled by VI Corps from the Forty-Fifth Infantry Division.¹¹⁴ Despite General Truscott's desire for another rehearsal, there would be none. The next amphibious landing conducted by the Third Division would be for real. At 0200 hours on 22 January 1944 at Anzio-Nettuno, the Third Infantry Division would once again assault a hostile beachhead and initiate Operation SHINGLE.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 3

INITIAL ASSAULT AND BEACHHEAD ESTABLISHMENT

Third Infantry Division Mission

Field Order #1 (Corrected Copy) dated 13 January 1944 read "Third Inf Div (Reinf) lands on D Day H Hour on beaches RED and GREEN, seizes and secures a beachhead (Opn Overlay) to be held at all costs and prepares for further operations to the NORTH."¹ An implied mission for the Third Infantry Division not specified in Field Order #1, but directed in VI Corps' tentative outline plan dated 2 January 1944 and VI Corps' outline plan dated 7 January 1944 was to protect the corps' right flank.²

Third Infantry Division Landing Area and Initial Beachhead

The VI Corps plan called for the Third Infantry Division to land on X-RAY beach, slightly to the south and east of Nettuno (see map 10). X-RAY beach was subdivided by the division into RED 1, RED 2, and GREEN beaches to facilitate landing all three infantry regiments abreast (see map 11). As late as 2 January 1944, the VI Corps tentative outline plan called for the Third Division to land with two regimental combat teams abreast and hence the subdivision of X-RAY beach into RED beach and GREEN beach.³ The change in the VI Corps plan which resulted in the division's mission to land with three regiments abreast explains the

further subdivision of RED beach into RED 1 and RED 2, given the advanced state of planning at the time of the change.

RED beach and GREEN beach were each 1,430 yards long and varied from 10 to 25 yards in width. Behind the beaches were brush covered sand dunes, which ranged from 150 to 300 yards in depth.⁴ RED beach was evenly divided into RED 2 on the left and RED 1 on the right.

The Third Infantry Division intended to capture an initial beachhead line roughly following the Mussolini Canal from its mouth at the Tyrrhenian Sea and extending north to the vicinity of Sessano. The beachhead line would then follow the canal's western branch and continue to the Anzio-Albano road, where it met the divisional boundary with the British 1st Infantry Division.⁵

Regimental Missions

Field Order #1 assigned each of the divisions' three infantry regiments specific tasks to accomplish. While the tasks varied by regiment (the 7th Infantry was assigned a total of six; the 15th Infantry, two; and the 30th Infantry, five), all three regiments were assigned one common task. Each regiment had previously designated one battalion as a beach assault battalion. These battalions received extensive pre-invasion training to prepare them for their mission of clearing the immediate beach area of enemy defenses. This would enable the follow-on battalions to rapidly pass through and advance to the regimental objectives.⁶ The 1st Battalion of the 7th Infantry, the 2d Battalion of the 30th Infantry, and the 3d Battalion of the 15th Infantry received the mission to land at H Hour on their assigned

beaches and reduce beach defenses within their zone of action to protect subsequent landings.⁷

The 7th Infantry's mission was to land at RED 2 beach, advance rapidly to the initial beachhead and destroy enemy forces within its zone of action. Upon occupying the initial beachhead, the 7th was to organize a defense with particular attention toward repelling an armored attack from the northwest or west. Field Order #1 also directed the regiment to send strong reconnaissance patrols to the Anzio-Albano road and to Area D, to establish and maintain contact with the Rangers and British forces, and to protect Third Infantry Division's left flank. Finally, the division ordered the 7th to be prepared to attack to capture Objective D or Objective A on division order.⁸

The 30th Infantry's mission was to advance rapidly from RED 1 beach to the initial beachhead while destroying enemy forces within the zone of action. Field Order #1 also assigned 30th Infantry the mission to prepare a defense to halt an armored attack from the northwest or west. Unlike the 7th Infantry, the 30th received specific guidance to occupy the initial beachhead with not less than one battalion as well as to outpost the position with not less than one battalion. Field Order #1 directed the 30th to block crossings on De La Ficoccia (northwest of Padiglione near the 30th and 7th boundary) and to send out strong reconnaissance patrols. Finally, the Third Division ordered the regiment to establish and maintain contact with the 3d Battalion of the 15th Infantry on the right flank and with the 7th Infantry on the left.⁹

Field Order #1 directed the 15th Infantry to land on GREEN beach and to assemble the regiment (minus 3d Battalion) in Area L and to be

prepared to assist 3d Battalion in clearing its zone to the initial beachhead. The division directed the 15th to move to Area M, on order, and to organize and defend the area. Finally, the plan called for the regiment to capture Nettuno, on order, and establish contact with the British 1st Division on the Third Infantry Division's left flank on the Anzio-Albano Road.¹⁰ Additional D Day missions for the men of the 15th Infantry, not specified in Field Order #1 but mentioned in the Third Infantry Division Report on Operation SHINGLE, were to relieve elements of the 3d Reconnaissance Troop at crossing sites over the Mussolini Canal and to protect the division's right flank.¹¹

Although not part of the Third Infantry Division, two other regimental sized units were attached to the division on D Day and merit discussion. The original plan called for the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment to drop at H-35 to capture enemy artillery batteries north of Anzio, to prevent reinforcement of enemy troops resisting SHINGLE, and to harass the enemy's rear. The 504th would be attached to the Third Division once contact was established.¹² Concern on the part of the British regarding the possibility of fratricide if American paratroopers were dropped to the front of British troops, as well as concerns of possible 504th casualties resulting from Allied naval gunfire support, resulted in the cancellation of the planned drop and a change of mission to land on D Day across the beach as VI Corps troops.

The order directed 6615 Ranger Force (Provisional) to land on YELLOW beach at H Hour to destroy coastal batteries in the vicinity of Anzio not later than daylight, clear the beach area between Anzio and Nettuno, and secure a beachhead.¹³ Not mentioned in Third Infantry

Division's Field Order #1 but ordered in the VI Corps plan were the additional missions of seizing and protecting from sabotage Anzio's port facilities and establishing contact with the British 1st Division on the Ranger's left flank and the Third Division on the Ranger's right flank.¹⁴ The Ranger Force was to be attached to Third Infantry Division upon establishment of the Ranger beachhead.¹⁵

Third Infantry Division Actions - 22 January

The regimental assault battalions landed at 0200 on their assigned beaches; 1st of the 7th on RED 2, 2d of the 30th on RED 1, and 3d of the 15th on GREEN beach. Simultaneously, on the division's left flank, 6615 Ranger Force (Provisional) landed on YELLOW beach.¹⁶ Landing with the Third Infantry Division assault battalions was the 3d Reconnaissance Troop which had attached to it the Provisional Mounted Troop (Dismounted), the Provisional Pack Artillery Battery, and combat engineers from the 10th Engineer Battalion.¹⁷

On RED 2 beach, 2d Battalion of the 7th landed at 0240 and was followed ashore at 0300 by 3d Battalion.¹⁸ By 0350, the 1st Battalion was reorganizing on the road directly behind the beach and at 0405 the battalion began its advance on Objective E.¹⁹ By 0330 leading elements of the 30th had reached the Nettuno-Acciarella road behind RED 1 beach and were preparing to advance on the regiment's initial objectives.²⁰ The division staff received a report at 0245 from the 15th on GREEN beach that the left flank company was advancing rapidly, while the company on the right flank was reported as making fair progress.²¹ As a result of the experience at Salerno, three platoons from A Company of

the 751st Tank Battalion were ashore by 0240, one platoon attached to each infantry regiment, to provide armored support for the infantry against the expected German counterattack.²² Three platoons from the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion also landed early to provide additional anti-tank support to the infantry.²³

Shortly after 0600, General Truscott and his staff came ashore.²⁴ By 0615, 2d of the 7th was advancing on Objective E-1.²⁵ The 30th reported its initial objectives occupied by the regiment's leading elements at 0625.²⁶ The division's three field artillery battalions, the 10th, 39th, and 41st, as well as the attached 69th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (105 SP) were ashore by 0600.²⁷ The 7th secured its initial beachhead by 0800,²⁸ the division occupied its beachhead by 0900,²⁹ and the division CP opened at 0915³⁰ a few hundred yards inland in a wooded area.

For the remainder of the morning the operation progressed beyond the Third Infantry Division's most optimistic hopes. Enemy resistance was virtually nonexistent, consisting almost entirely of scattered minefields³¹ and small units of a Panzer Grenadier battalion from the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division as well as engineers.³² While the three infantry regiments were advancing on their initial objectives, the 3d Reconnaissance Troop was accomplishing its mission to seize, mine, and destroy the crossings over the Mussolini Canal from the vicinity of Sessano south to the sea and hold until the arrival of the infantry. The men of the Reconnaissance Troop secured a total of seven bridges on D Day and destroyed bridges 1, 3, 4, and 5 (#1 was nearest the sea, #5 the farthest from the sea). The soldiers also prepared for demolition

and set guards on bridges 2, 6, and 7.³³ In a skirmish at bridge 1, men from the division destroyed three German armored cars,³⁴ killed five and captured six enemy soldiers.³⁵

While the 3d Reconnaissance Troop was advancing in the eastern portion of the beachhead, the 7th Infantry advanced in the west. The 1st Battalion captured thirty enemy soldiers on Objective E³⁶ and a patrol from Company A established contact with the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (part of 6615 Rangers).³⁷ Effective 1000 hours, the Ranger Force became attached to the Third Infantry Division.³⁸ The 2d Battalion established a defense on Objective E-1 (oriented to the north and northwest), conducted extensive patrolling which resulted in sixteen enemy captured, and sent a reconnaissance patrol to Objective D on the division's western boundary with the British 1st Division. By 1200 hours, 3d Battalion had occupied Objective E-2 and sent out patrols.³⁹

In the center of the division's beachhead, the 30th Infantry reported no machine guns, mines, or artillery encountered during its early advance to Objective L. Reconnaissance moved forward and seized the crossroad and bridge at Le Ferriere (northeast portion of Objective B) prior to 1200 hours.⁴⁰

During the afternoon of D Day, the remainder of the 751st Tank Battalion and the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion came ashore. The initial G3 report from the beachhead showed the 751st with 53 operational tanks out of 54 and the 601st with 32 operational tank destroyers out of 36.⁴¹ On the division's left flank, the 7th Infantry sent strong combat patrols to conduct a reconnaissance of Objectives A and D. Finding the objectives tenable, the regiment advanced on them,

beginning movement in the late afternoon.⁴² Near the center of the Third Division's beachhead the 15th (minus 3d Battalion) moved into area M. The 3d Battalion continued to protect the division's right flank.⁴³ The 30th sent reconnaissance patrols to the north and northeast during the afternoon⁴⁴ and by nightfall advanced elements of the regiment had seized all crossings over the Mussolini Canal's western branch from Padiglione eastward.⁴⁵

As darkness fell on D Day, the Third Infantry Division continued to expand the beachhead and the Germans prepared for their initial counterattack. In the division's western portion of the beachhead, the 7th Infantry began to advance in strength on Objectives A and D. The 3d Battalion moved out at 1800 and headed for Objective A (area southwest of Casale Torre Di Padiglione). They closed on the objective at 2315. The 2d Battalion started for Objective D at 1830, but did not close on the objective until D+1 at 0400. Meanwhile, 1st Battalion moved into regimental reserve positions at 2000.⁴⁶

While the 7th was advancing in the west, the 30th continued to advance from the center of the beachhead. During the evening of D Day, the 30th moved to areas around Campomorto, Le Ferriere, and Bottacci, one battalion to each, with the regimental CP displacing to the Bottacci area.⁴⁷ Reconnaissance patrols sent ahead to Campomorto reported no enemy as of 2100. Most of the 30th reported closing on their new positions at 2200.⁴⁸ The 1st Battalion had designated special teams to advance ahead of the main body with the mission of seizing and defending the bridges across the west branch.⁴⁹ The only significant enemy resistance to the 30th's advance was a small-scale counterattack by

between three and five armored vehicles against Company A in the vicinity of Le Ferriere.⁵⁰ As a result of reports of enemy forces from the Reconnaissance Troop, division ordered the 30th to send two rifle companies to defend in the vicinity of Sessano (G0423).⁵¹

Late in the evening of D Day, elements of the 30th Infantry and the 3d Reconnaissance Troop, guarding the crossing sites over the Mussolini Canal and its west branch, came under attack from units of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division and the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division.⁵² The Hermann Göring units captured the bridge at the canal juncture near Sessano. Three companies of the 71st Panzer Grenadiers advanced from Campomorto against Third Infantry Division security elements at Le Ferriere and were able to retake it and destroy the bridge just as leading elements of the 30th Infantry reached the site early on D+1.⁵³ As the initial German counterattack progressed during the evening of D Day/D+1, the enemy retook many of the crossing sites over the Mussolini Canal and the west branch.⁵⁴

Initial German Actions

When the Third Infantry Division came ashore on D Day, complete tactical surprise had been achieved. The only German troops committed along the coast in the invasion area were the 2d Battalion of the 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment (29th Panzer Grenadier Division), one engineer company from the same division, two engineer companies from the 4th Parachute Division, and the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 29th Panzer Grenadiers. The defensive sector of the 2d Battalion of the 71st Panzer Grenadiers and the engineers extended from the mouth of the Tiber River

south to Anzio (a sector of forty-one miles). The Reconnaissance Battalion's sector extended from the mouth of the Astura River south to Terracina (a sector of thirty-two miles). The only headquarters available to control the initial German reaction to the invasion was Army Group C in the Rome area, hardly an ideal command and control situation.⁵⁵

While some confusion exists as to when Field Marshal Albert Kesselring first learned of the invasion (reports vary between 0300 and 0500), what is certain is that he reacted decisively and forcefully. At 0500 he ordered the 4th Parachute Division and elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division to block all roads leading to Rome and to the Alban Hills in an effort to isolate the beachhead.⁵⁶

Army Group C reported the landing to OKW at 0600 and requested the troops designated for contingency plan MARDER I (715th Motorized Infantry Division from France and the 114th Jäger Division from the Balkans). The 92d Infantry Division began activation in northern Italy to provide Army Group C a third division.⁵⁷

Barely an hour later, at 0710, Field Marshal Kesselring ordered General Eberhard von Mackensen and his Fourteenth Army to make forces available for contingency plan CASE RICHARD. Divisions transferred to the invasion area included the 65th Infantry Division from Genoa (minus one regiment), the 362d Infantry Division from Rimini (minus one regiment), and the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Reichsführer SS" with two regiments from Livorno and Lubiana. These divisions started movement for the beachhead area on the evening of D Day.⁵⁸

At 0830 Army Group C ordered the Tenth Army, under General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, to transfer a corps headquarters and all combat forces that could be spared to the invasion area. By 1700 the I Parachute Corps headquarters, under General Alfred Schlemm, was in position and assumed command of the beachhead defense.⁵⁹ In addition to the I Parachute Corps headquarters, Tenth Army started the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division (minus one regiment), the 71st Infantry Division, elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, elements of the 1st Parachute Division, and elements of the 26th Panzer Division rolling toward the invasion beachhead.⁶⁰

During the evening of D Day, Army Group C directed Tenth Army to discontinue the counterattack along the Garigliano River and to send additional combat forces to the invasion site. The 26th Panzer Division began preparations to move to the area around Avezzano to prepare for a counterattack against the beachhead. Also ordered to the sound of the guns were additional elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division and a significant part of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division.⁶¹

Situational Summary

As darkness fell at Anzio-Nettuno and D Day neared its end and D+1 began, three critical activities were occurring. First, elements of thirteen different German divisions were racing toward the invasion site or were making final preparations to do so. Secondly, soldiers of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and the Hermann Göring Panzer Division were locked in close combat with cavalymen of the 3d Reconnaissance Troop and infantrymen of the 30th Infantry along the Mussolini Canal and

its west branch. Finally, the initiative and momentum were rapidly shifting from the VI (US) Corps to the Germans.

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- ³⁴Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 15,17.
- ³⁵3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 January 1944" (CARL).
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- ⁴¹3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 January" 1944.
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CHAPTER 4

ATTEMPTS TO EXPAND BEACHHEAD

(23 JANUARY - 1 FEBRUARY 1944)

Third Infantry Division Major Objective 23 - 24 January

The Third Infantry Division directed virtually all actions during its first eleven days ashore towards the accomplishment of two missions, each of which were key elements of the VI Corps mission, to secure a beachhead and to be prepared to advance north towards Colli Laziali.¹ Remembering the VI Corps experience at the Salerno beachhead, where the invasion force was nearly driven back into the sea, the division concentrated on seizing and securing a beachhead on 23 and 24 January, while preparing for the expected German counterattack. The division expanded the beachhead's right flank to the Mussolini Canal and to the north to the canal's western branch (vicinity of Sessano extending to the vicinity of Padiglione). It also undertook fairly extensive patrolling to gain contact with the enemy.²

While General Truscott understood that his division would later advance on Cisterna as part of VI Corps' mission to advance in the direction of the Colli Laziali, the division's actions on 23 and 24 January resulted from the perceived need to prepare for the expected German counterattack. Several factors help explain Third Division's actions:

General John Lucas, VI Corps commander, seems to have believed his Corps incapable of immediately moving to and capturing the Colli Laziale, let alone successfully defending it against a German counterattack.³ While the railroad embankment running near Cisterna would undoubtedly have provided favorable defensive terrain for the division, an attempt to defend this considerably larger perimeter on 23 or 24 January would have spread it perilously thin with dangerously small reserves. On the other hand, the favorable defensive terrain along the Mussolini Canal and its western branch provided a beachhead line which could be outposted and defended while still allowing for the retention of a significant reserve.⁴ Finally, intelligence at 15th Army Group suggested the Germans would defend the high ground surrounding the beachhead.⁵ If this was correct, one could argue that a successful defense of the present beachhead line against the counterattack would likely result in a German withdrawal to their main line of resistance and away from Cisterna. Consequently, if VI Corps spent the first few days building up a secure beachhead to successfully defeat the counterattack, Cisterna might be captured later with relative ease.

Third Infantry Division Major Objective
25 January - 1 February

The Third Division began in earnest on 25 January to attempt to secure Cisterna and prepare for further operations to the north.⁶ Simultaneously, the division continued its defensive preparations. During the eight days from 25 January to 1 February, the division advanced within a kilometer of Cisterna, but it would not be until late May that it would achieve that goal.

Why was Cisterna so important to both the Allies and the Germans? From the Allied perspective, Cisterna lay near the entrance to the Velletri Gap. The capture of Cisterna would permit VI Corps to attempt to cut Highway 6 by one of two methods. First, an advance from Cisterna towards Velletri would allow it to assault the Alban Hills and, with their capture, cut Highway 6 as it neared Rome from the east. Highway 6, it must be remembered, was by far the more important of the two primary lines of communication between Rome and the German Tenth Army in the Gustav Line (the ultimate target of Operation SHINGLE); the other being Highway 7 which would have been cut by virtue of the capture of Cisterna. The second method available to the VI Corps was an advance from Cisterna to Valmontone. VI Corps could advance through the Velletri Gap, across the Lepini Mountains, or a combination of both. Regardless of which method VI Corps employed, Cisterna lay squarely in the Third Division's area of responsibility and its capture was a vital first step.

From the German perspective, Cisterna would have been important for exactly the same reason. With the decision by German commanders to establish their main line of resistance up against the beachhead line, as opposed to the Alban Hills and Lepini Mountains, a successful defense of Cisterna would dramatically reduce the options available to VI Corps for cutting Highway 6. The Allies' only remaining viable option would be an attack out of the beachhead up the Anzio-Albano road towards the Colli Laziali, hardly an attractive scenario for VI Corps.

Third Infantry Division Actions
23 - 24 January

On 23 and 24 January, all five of the division's infantry regiments (7th, 15th, 30th, 504th Parachute, and 6615 Ranger Force) concentrated on seizing and securing the initial beachhead and preparing it to be held at all costs against the expected German counterattack.

The initial skirmishes of the battle of Anzio-Nettuno were fought on 23-24 January, as the Third Infantry Division attempted to expand the beachhead and secure the VI Corps designated initial beachhead line. While it was pushing outward, the Germans attempted to contain the invaders and establish bridgeheads on the American held side of the Mussolini Canal.

The small unit fighting, primarily at bridges and road junctions, raged back and forth throughout both days. Early in the morning of the 23d, just as leading elements of the 30th Infantry were approaching La Ferriere, the enemy destroyed the bridge.⁷ During the early morning hours the enemy made attempts to establish bridgeheads over the Mussolini Canal. The 1st Battalion of the 30th made contact with the enemy by 0700 and was still engaged at mid-morning.⁸ The 7th Infantry had advanced to the Campo Di Carne-Padiglione road by noon.⁹ The 6615 Ranger Force relieved the 7th (minus its 3d Battalion) beginning at 1250.¹⁰ Following its relief by the rangers, the 7th became the division's reserve in late afternoon. During the evening of the 23d, the regiment (-) moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of the Tre Cancelli road junction.¹¹

During the afternoon of the 23d, the Germans made successful attacks across both the Mussolini Canal and its western branch. At 1600

they overran a 30th Infantry outpost on bridge #8,¹² and at 1800 crossed bridge #2.¹³ In all, the Germans succeeded in crossing at bridges 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8 during the afternoon with strong combat patrols.¹⁴

Men of the 15th, 30th, and 504th counterattacked the enemy bridgeheads that evening with the mission to destroy the enemy and clear the area south and west of the Mussolini Canal.¹⁵ Although reports indicate Third Division was established on the corps beachhead line by nightfall and the enemy driven back across the Mussolini Canal by late on the 23d,¹⁶ in fact the last German bridgehead was not destroyed until 1010 on the 24th.¹⁷

It can be argued that this was an appropriate tactic on the part of the Germans, still weak in manpower and firepower, in that these relatively small scale and local attacks reinforced the American belief that the beachhead must be secured and built up prior to any advance from the beachhead. The German units at Anzio-Nettuno during the first three days bought time for their Tenth and Fourteenth Army comrades to arrive at the invasion site in time to thwart the VI Corps attempt at breakout in force.

On the 24th of January, the 504th relieved the 3d Reconnaissance Troops on the Third Division's right flank along the Mussolini Canal.¹⁸ Once the fighting for the bridges had ceased, the 15th Infantry (on the right) and the 30th Infantry (on the left) probed towards Cisterna. 15th Infantry had the mission to send two companies across bridges 6 and 8 to advance as far as possible without incurring excessive casualties. The 30th Infantry had the same mission, but oriented on bridges 12 and 13. Plans directed the four companies to cross the line of departure at

1510.¹⁹ Results of both efforts were somewhat disappointing, as only one of the four companies, Company F of the 30th, was in position the next morning (25 January) to support the first serious attempt by 3ID to advance on Cisterna.²⁰ On the division's left flank, the Ranger Force and the 3d of the 7th had a relatively uneventful day sending out patrols to their front with the exception of a firefight with an enemy patrol at 1310.²¹

As the 24th drew to a close, the Third Division, with the attached 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment and 6615 Ranger Force, defended positions from the mouth of the Mussolini Canal to the Anzio-Albano Road, a frontage of approximately twenty miles! The division defended with the 7th Infantry (minus its 3d Battalion) in division reserve. The 15th Infantry and 30th Infantry each had two battalions in the front line and one battalion in reserve.²²

Third Infantry Division Actions
25 January - 1 February

From 25 through 27 January, the Third Division made its first serious attempt to move beyond the initial beachhead line and capture Cisterna (see map 12).²³ This attack met with only partial success so it spent 28 and 29 January consolidating its gains, regrouping, and preparing for an all out attempt to capture Cisterna in conjunction with a VI Corps offensive across the entire beachhead.

During the early morning hours of the 25th, the 15th Infantry and 30th Infantry attacked with one battalion each (2d of the 15th and 1st of the 30th) towards Cisterna.²⁴ The 2d of the 15th crossed the line of departure at 0500 and attacked to the right of and parallel to

the Conca-Cisterna road.²⁵ The 1st of the 30th crossed its line of departure at 0630 and attacked along the Campomorto-Cisterna road.²⁶ Both units ran into heavy German resistance throughout the day.²⁷ After gaining approximately one and one-half miles, 2d of the 15th ground to a halt near Isola Bella; 1st of the 30th was able to gain approximately two miles before being stopped at a road junction below Ponte Rotto.²⁸ With neither battalion able to continue the attack, the division ordered both units to establish security and hold their positions during that night.²⁹

While 2d of the 15th and 1st of the 30th were fighting their way toward Cisterna, on their right the 504th advanced across the Mussolini Canal in a diversionary attack intended to draw the enemy's attention from Cisterna. The 2d of the 504th reached Borgo Piave at 1815,³⁰ but withdrew (leaving a patrol to observe and report) back across the Mussolini Canal during the night of 25-26 January.³¹ On the 1st of the 30th's left flank, the 3d of the 7th and 6615 Ranger Force advanced northward, while maintaining contact between Third Division and the British forces to the west.³²

After the disappointing progress on the 25th, the 15th and the 30th renewed the assault with two battalions each on 26 January. Both regiments continued the attack through the 27th, but as their momentum died on the 27th, the division was still three miles short of Cisterna.³³

The 30th was able to kick the enemy out of Ponte Rotto³⁴ on 26 January and that afternoon at 1400 the 15th attacked northeast to establish a road block on the Cisterna-Littoria road. The 15th came up

just short of its objective and held its position during the night.³⁵
That same evening, patrols from the 3d of the 30th reached Highway 7.³⁶

On the 27th of January, the Third Division's attack finally came to a halt. This day saw all three battalions of the 15th Infantry fighting near the Conca-Cisterna road.³⁷ The 1st of the 30th did its part to help the 15th by conducting a demonstration with fire at 1400 in support of a 3d of the 15th attack towards Feminamorta to cut the Conca-Cisterna road.³⁸ On the division's left flank, 6615 Ranger Force attacked toward Carroceto and the 3d of the 7th pushed beyond Carano.³⁹ On the right, the 504th continued its aggressive patrolling east of the Mussolini Canal.⁴⁰

During the evening of the 27th, 3d Battalion of the 30th relieved 1st Battalion on the line. In an effort to deceive the enemy as to the Third's strength, light and noise discipline were intentionally lax in order to portray the arrival of reinforcements, rather than a relief in place.⁴¹ This may provide a clue to the mindset of the division commander and staff during this crucial stage of the battle. It implies they were still concerned, perhaps overly so, about a German counterattack. Since a substantial portion of the infantry worked on defensive positions along the Mussolini Canal during 27 January,⁴² instead of adding weight to the attack towards Cisterna, one cannot but wonder what might have happened if the principle of mass had been adhered to.

The capture of Cisterna on 25 or even 27 January would not, by itself, have achieved the operational goal of SHINGLE. It would, however, almost certainly have had a profound influence upon the

impending German counterattack. In addition, it would have negated the necessity for the 30 January attempt to capture it, which ended in disaster.

One final event occurred the evening of 27/28 January the significance of which would not be appreciated by the Third Division staff at the time. A patrol from the 30th Infantry reached the railroad west of Cisterna and reported that the enemy was digging in.⁴³ The Germans, contrary to the intelligence assessment prepared by General Alexander's staff, had no intention of pulling back to stronger positions inland.⁴⁴ The Fourteenth Army's main line of resistance would run right through Cisterna. It had not been completed on 27 January; by 30 January it would be established and the Third Infantry Division(+) would crash headlong into it. Four long and bloody months would pass before a Third Division soldier set foot in Cisterna.

On 28 and 29 January the division continued to patrol, conduct small scale limited-objective attacks, organize forward positions,⁴⁵ and prepare for its intended final assault against Cisterna. The attack begun on 24 January as company-sized probes toward Cisterna, which grew to battalion sized assaults on 25 January and multiple battalion assaults on 26 and 27 January, culminated in a division-sized assault begun at 0100 on the 30th of January.

During the evening of 28 January, the Third moved its command post forward to Borgo Montello (approximately one mile south of the line of departure) in preparation for the 30 January attack.⁴⁶ That same evening it received orders for the 504th to be relieved by the Forty-Fifth Infantry Division. The orders also directed the British 1st

Infantry Division to move its boundary with the Third Division eastward to the stream running north/south through Carano.⁴⁷ The effect of these changes allowed the Third Division to mass the full combat power of a reinforced infantry division assault on a considerably narrower frontage.

The 504th turned over its sector to the Forty-Fifth Division as far north as bridge #5 over the Mussolini Canal at 1400 on the 29th and moved into an assembly area to prepare for its part in the assault.⁴⁸ The VI Corps ordered that a battalion of the 504th be detached from the regiment and attached to another VI Corps unit, the regiment detached its 3d Battalion.⁴⁹ The Third Division shifted its left boundary eastward and the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion assumed the mission to anchor the division's flank with the British. The 3d of the 7th and 6615 Ranger Force (minus the 509th) moved out of the line and to assembly areas to prepare for the attack. The 3d of the 7th closed on its assembly area at 0530 and Ranger Force (-) closed at 1205.⁵⁰ While these units were being shifted out of the line in preparation for the attack, the 30th Infantry conducted two successful company-sized limited objective attacks near Pratone and Carano to screen the movement and assembly of the 7th Infantry.⁵¹

The VI Corps' Field Order #20 dated 29 January, ordered Third Infantry Division (Reinforced) to capture Velletri and then to seize Albano, Genzano, and the surrounding high ground as part of the overall VI Corps offensive. The division was then to prepare to advance north.⁵² Anticipating the VI Corps plan, Third Division issued Field Order #3, dated 28 January.⁵³ The division's plan envisioned the 1st

and 3d Ranger Battalions crossing the line of departure at 0100 on 30 January and infiltrating between enemy strongpoints to Cisterna (see map 13). The 15th Infantry and 4th Ranger Battalion would cross the line of departure at 0200, punch through the German defense, and race to support the 1st and 3d Battalions in Cisterna. The 504th(-), on the division right flank, would conduct a diversionary attack up the east branch of the Mussolini Canal, while on the division left flank the 7th would attack north to cut Highway 7 and the railroad west of Cisterna. The Third was ready to attack on the 29th, but VI Corps ordered a delay until 30 January.⁵⁴

The 1st and 3d Ranger Battalions began their infiltration towards Cisterna at 0100 (some accounts state 0130).⁵⁵ The Rangers followed the Pantano ditch northwesterly as they moved, roughly paralleling and to the right of the Conca-Isola Bella-Cisterna road. The night was moonless, cloudy, and bitterly cold.⁵⁶ By dawn they were roughly 800 yards south of Cisterna.⁵⁷ As they emerged from the ditch, they came under intense enemy automatic weapons fire. At 1215 the Third received the last radio transmission from the Rangers.⁵⁸ Of the 767 Rangers that crossed the line of departure that morning, only six were able to make their way back to friendly lines.⁵⁹

Fierce German resistance halted the 4th Ranger Battalion and the 15th Infantry almost immediately after crossing the line of departure at 0200. The 4th Battalion was stopped along the Conca-Cisterna road and in a determined but futile attempt to aid the two trapped Ranger battalions, 3d of the 15th maneuvered to the right to outflank the Germans holding up the 4th Battalion.⁶⁰ By 1200, when 3d of the 15th

cleared Isola Bella, the battalion was only about 2,000 yards from the besieged Rangers.⁶¹ It was too late for the 1st and 3d Battalions, they were forced to surrender within minutes of the capture of Isola Bella.⁶² In addition to the 3d of the 15th and the 4th Rangers, others were trying to rescue the trapped Rangers. A platoon from the 3d Reconnaissance Troop punched through the Germans and headed up the Conca-Cisterna road. The Germans closed the trap behind them. Of the forty-three men in the platoon that day, only one returned.⁶³

The Third Division front advanced on 30 January, but the results were disappointing and the casualties heavy (see map 14). The 1st of the 15th was in heavy contact almost from the line of departure and by nightfall had gained only about 2,000 yards.⁶⁴ All three battalions of the 7th saw action as they advanced north along the Fosso Delle Mole and the Crocetta-Cisterna road.⁶⁵ The 7th ran into such heavy enemy resistance that both the 509th and Company G of the 30th advanced to the north in an attempt to relieve pressure on the 7th.⁶⁶ The 1st of the 7th gained approximately 1,500 yards on the 30th, while 2d of the 7th made even less.⁶⁷ During the evening of the 30th, the regiment committed its reserve (3d Battalion). The 3d of the 7th reached its objective near Ponte Rotto early the next morning.⁶⁸ The 504th spent most of the 30th attacking, consolidating gains, and repelling a counterattack.⁶⁹

On the 31st of January, the Third Division continued the attack towards Cisterna from Isola Bella and Ponte Rotto and towards the railroad west of Cisterna (see map 15).⁷⁰ The 1st of the 30th attacked along the Ponte Rotto-Cisterna axis and the 2d of the 15th attacked up

the Conca-Cisterna axis. Both units encountered strong German resistance.⁷¹ The 1st of the 7th fought its way to the railroad, but was forced to withdraw approximately 400 yards to the south and establish an all around defense. The battalion crossed the line of departure at 1400 with about 200 men. When the battalion reached the railroad, it was down to approximately 100 men and almost out of ammunition.⁷² Patrols from the 1st of the 30th made their way to within 700 yards of Cisterna the evening of 31 January/1 February (see map 16).⁷³

The attack continued and finally faltered on 1 February (see map 17). When it was over, the men of the 2d of the 15th were roughly 1000 yards south of Cisterna and requesting permission to fight their way into the town after dark. Likewise, the men of 1st of the 30th had paid dearly, but were only a mile to the west of Cisterna at 1030.⁷⁴ The 1st of the 30th received the order to hold its ground, close up its supporting armor, and be prepared to continue the attack.⁷⁵

There would be no continuation of the attack. Since D Day, the Third Infantry Division had suffered in excess of 3,000 casualties and had lost more than a third of its attached tanks and tank destroyers. General Truscott did not believe his remaining reserves were sufficient to punch through to Cisterna.⁷⁶ As 1 February drew to a close, the division assumed a defensive posture.⁷⁷ On 2 February the Fifth Army commander ordered the VI Corps to consolidate the beachhead and make dispositions to meet an attack.⁷⁸ The actions required to comply with these orders had already begun on 1 February. The Third Division improved and consolidated its positions, repulsed numerous German local

counterattacks, and patrolled extensively to its front and flanks.⁷⁹ The division also waited for the inevitable German counterattack, the same one it had been expecting since the very first days of the battle. The Third Division did not have long to wait.

German Perspective
25 January - 1 February

As the Allies made their first cautious attempt to expand the beachhead on 25 January, German units were racing toward the beachhead from France, the Balkans, Germany, and the Tenth Army. The German units already surrounding the beachhead understood that reinforcements were enroute and that their mission was to contain the Allies within the existing beachhead until a counterattack could be launched.⁸⁰ Field Marshal Kesselring ordered General von Mackensen's Fourteenth Army from its headquarters in Verona on 24 January to the invasion site to take control of the battle. Fourteenth Army assumed control of the battle on 25 January.⁸¹ The Germans, based on their observations of the Americans in Sicily and Italy, did not believe VI Corps would attack from the beachhead prior to 26 January. Further, the Germans expected initial localized rather than major attacks. The Germans initially planned to counterattack the beachhead on 28 January (D+6), but allowed for the possibility of an earlier counterattack if VI Corps attacked sooner than expected.⁸²

The German staffs skillfully applied their knowledge of American tactics to the terrain and developed a fairly accurate estimate of how, when, and where the corps would attack. When small scale attacks toward Cisterna finally began on the 25th of January, it did not surprise the

Germans.⁸³ While the Germans were successful in predicting where the VI Corps would attack, they were deceived into believing a second Allied landing in the area near Civitavecchia was probable.⁸⁴ The obvious result of this deception was that the Germans diverted some units intended for the containment and counterattack of the beachhead to the area near the Tiber River, which made them unavailable for the defense conducted from 25 January to 1 February.

Situational Summary
22 - 31 January

While the Germans attempted to contain the beachhead and build up their counterattack forces, the VI Corps was initially concerned about the security of the beachhead. The recent unpleasantness at Salerno and the appreciation of just how close the Germans had come to throwing the VI Corps back into the sea weighed heavily on the Americans at Anzio-Nettuno. The Third Division (and the rest of VI Corps) expected the Germans to counterattack quickly and in strength. Hence, even when the division started its initial company and battalion-sized probes towards Cisterna on 24 and 25 January, a significant portion of the division simultaneously reduced small previously missed pockets of German resistance and constructed defensive positions.

This initial phase of the battle was in fact a race, begun on 22 January and ending on 1 February. From the American perspective, the purpose of the race was to secure the beachhead prior to the German counterattack, build up forces sufficient to break through the encircling German forces, and advance to the corps' operational objectives. The purpose of the race from the German perspective was to

contain the VI Corps within the present beachhead and to bring up sufficient reinforcements to allow the Germans to drive VI Corps back into the sea.

Between 22 and 29 January, both sides probed and continued to build up their forces and defensive positions. The Germans delayed the counterattack originally scheduled for 28 January until 1 February so that sufficient reinforcements would be available.⁸⁵ The race was decided between 30 January and 1 February. As the Third Division crossed its line of departure before dawn on 30 January to begin its advance on Cisterna, elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, 26th Panzer Division, and 114th Jäger Division lay in its path.⁸⁶ Some of these units moved into position straight from the line of march on the evening of 29 January and the morning of 30 January.⁸⁷ It had been, in the words of Wellington to Creevey after Waterloo, "the nearest run thing in your life."⁸⁸ Neither side would understand it until the 1st of February, but the Germans had won the race.

The Germans won the first race, but at great cost. As darkness fell on 1 February, the Third Infantry Division had a battalion within one-half mile south of Cisterna and another within one mile to the west. The division had thrown the Germans completely onto the defense and inflicted heavy casualties on them. So tenuous was the German position that during the evening of 30 January Field Marshal Kesselring reported to OKW that the planned 1 February counterattack against the beachhead had to be postponed.⁸⁹

Situational Summary
1-2 February

On 1 and 2 February the Germans conducted numerous localized counterattacks to the west of Cisterna to straighten their line of defense.⁹⁰ The Third Division was generally successful in fighting off these counterattacks and concentrated on consolidating its gains and improving its defensive positions.

As the initial phase of the battle ended and the next began, several observations may be appropriate. Despite the fact that it did not capture Cisterna and had suffered heavy casualties in the attempt, the Third (and the rest of VI Corps) had inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans and forced them completely on the defensive.⁹¹ This bought time for the division to further prepare its defenses for the now much delayed German counterattack. It also allowed time for VI Corps to bring in additional reinforcements to strengthen the beachhead defenses.

Operation SHINGLE, intended to turn the German defenders out of the Gustav Line or force the thinning of their defenses to contain the beachhead, was on the verge of failure. Time was running out for the Allies. SHINGLE had not turned the Germans out of the Gustav Line and had not caused nearly as many units to be pulled from the line as might have been hoped. All VI Corps had achieved to date was to establish a beachhead which, as events in February and March would prove, the Germans were not able to destroy, and to tie down a mixed bag of German units of widely varying combat value roughly equal in number to VI Corps. The clock was also ticking on OVERLORD. Much of the shipping supporting SHINGLE was earmarked for OVERLORD and the Americans made it clear that OVERLORD was not going to be postponed because of SHINGLE.

If VI Corps did not succeed in breaking out of the beachhead soon, Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army were doomed to spend the winter of '44 slugging it out from peak to peak, valley to valley, on the Gustav Line.

While at this point in the battle time was running out for the Third Division and its comrades within the beachhead, it did not necessarily favor the German Fourteenth Army either. The VI Corps attack had forced the Germans to commit reserves they had been husbanding for the counterattack, so Fourteenth Army now needed additional reinforcements to stand a reasonable chance of successfully destroying the beachhead.⁹² On 1 February Army Group C notified Fourteenth Army that the situation on the Tenth Army front, i.e., Gustav Line, was so serious that new reserves would soon be required. These reserves, it was noted, would have to come from the Fourteenth Army as none were available elsewhere.⁹³ Time was forcing the Germans at Anzio-Nettuno into a "do or die" situation; the next phase of the battle, the counterattack to drive the invaders back into the sea, was about to begin.

Endnotes

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- ⁴Ibid., 311.
- ⁵Jackson, 186.
- ⁶3d Infantry Division, "Field Order #1 (Corrected Copy)," 1.
- ⁷Truscott, 311.
- ⁸3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 - 231200 January 1944."
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- ¹⁰3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 231201 - 241200 January 1944."
- ¹¹White, 74.
- ¹²30th Inf Regt, "Operations Report January 1944," 1.
- ¹³3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 231201 - 241200 January 1944."
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- ¹⁵Ibid.
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- ¹⁸Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 19.
- ¹⁹3rd Inf Division, "Report on Operation 'SHINGLE'," 4.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹Operation SHINGLE (Anzio) 22 January - 1 February 1944, 73.
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- ²⁴Truscott, 312.
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- ²⁶Sheehan, 67.
- ²⁷3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 241201 - 251200 January 1944."
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⁸⁴Ibid., 23, 26.

⁸⁵Ibid., 14, 19.

⁸⁶Ibid., 21, 23.

⁸⁷Ibid., 21.

⁸⁸John Keegan, The Mask of Command (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 103.

⁸⁹"The German Operation at Anzio," 22.

⁹⁰Ibid., 23, 25.

⁹¹Ibid., 22.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 23

CHAPTER 5

GERMAN COUNTERATTACKS

(FEBRUARY - MARCH 1944)

German Preparations

The German plan to counterattack and destroy the beachhead in early February had been interrupted by the VI Corps attempt in late January to expand and break out from the beachhead. German casualties as well as material losses had been so great that the planned counterattack was postponed until replacements, reserves, and ammunition stocks could be built back up.

What did Adolph Hitler and OKW hope to accomplish by the destruction of the Anzio beachhead? The Germans knew that the Allies intended to invade northwest Europe. German intelligence suspected the landings were planned for the spring or summer.¹ The OKW understood that units tied down in Italy containing the Anzio beachhead could prove decisive in defeating the expected cross-channel invasion, if they could be disengaged in Italy and redeployed. Hitler also understood the potential political and strategic ramifications on the cross-channel invasion if the Anzio beachhead were pushed back into the sea. OVERLORD would almost certainly have been delayed, buying precious time and possibly tearing deeply at the somewhat fragile British-American alliance.²

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring and Hitler were both of the opinion that the counterattack to destroy the beachhead should be launched with all possible speed. Kesselring did not want to allow the Allies time to recover from their failure to break out of the beachhead. He believed that a counterattack launched before the Allies could establish a strong defensive system stood a good chance of success.³ The field marshal also was concerned with events elsewhere. The German Tenth Army defending on the Gustav Line had been stripped dangerously thin to supply forces for the beachhead defense.⁴ Units sent by OKW to the beachhead were needed on other fronts and their stay at the beachhead was intended to be of a limited duration.⁵ From Kesselring's perspective, the Germans had only limited time remaining where sufficient forces to destroy the beachhead would be available. If the counterattack did not occur soon, the opportunity would be lost and never regained.

General Eberhard von Mackensen, as commander of the Fourteenth Army, was tasked to carry out the counterattack and ensure the destruction of the beachhead. He disagreed with Field Marshal Kesselring on the timing of the counterattack. While understanding the desirability of striking the beachhead before the Allies were fully prepared, von Mackensen argued against rushing the operation before it was fully ready. He believed his army would get only one chance to destroy VI Corps. The Germans could not hope to achieve a sufficient correlation of forces for a second attempt with any realistic expectation of success, due to shortages of supplies, personnel, and weaponry.⁶

The problem facing Field Marshal Kesselring, General von Mackensen, and the Fourteenth Army staff was the question of how to successfully accomplish the destruction of the beachhead. When studying their possible courses of action, the Germans evaluated the availability of cover and concealment, VI Corps defenses (to include naval gunfire), and obstacles. They also studied the terrain to evaluate off-road employment of their armor and to determine the shortest route to the key coastal sector of the beachhead.⁷

After an analysis and evaluation of the options available, Fourteenth Army developed its plan--Operation FISCHFANG--for the destruction of the VI Corps beachhead. Flanking attacks along the coast from northwest of Anzio or from east of the Mussolini Canal were ruled out because of vulnerability to Allied naval gunfire, as well as significant obstacles (dense woods in the west and the canal in the east) to armored forces.⁸ The only two remaining avenues of approach for the Germans were the Aprilia-Anzio road and the Cisterna-Nettuno road. Operation FISCHFANG specified the main attack follow the Aprilia-Anzio road, as it provided the shortest route to Anzio and German reconnaissance reports from the end of January indicated tanks could be employed on either side of the road.⁹

The German plan for Operation FISCHFANG was designed to be a two-phase operation.¹⁰ In phase one, the Allied defenses were to be breached by the German main effort along both sides of the Aprilia-Anzio road. The Hermann Göring Division would execute a diversionary attack against the Third Infantry Division with Isola Bella as the initial objective.¹¹ In phase two, following the successful breach of the VI

Corps defenses, the Fourteenth Army would commit its mobile reserves to exploit the breach and advance to Anzio-Nettuno. The surviving defenders would be rolled up from their flanks.¹²

As a result of extensive German casualties and the successful British establishment of a salient in German lines north of Aprilia, General von Mackensen resorted to small scale attacks to keep VI Corps off balance until FISCHFANG could commence. This would gradually weaken VI Corps, while simultaneously building up Fourteenth Army resources for the major counterattack. The first small scale attack was against the salient during the night of 3/4 February and continued during the 4th. Other attacks launched to capture Aprilia and Carroceto were successful and helped secure the German line of departure for the main effort in FISCHFANG.¹³

Third Infantry Division Preparations

Fifth Army had ordered (based upon ULTRA intercepts) VI Corps to shift from offensive operations to the defense on 2 February.¹⁴ On 3 February, VI Corps issued verbal orders to its units to transition to defensive operations and followed up with Field Order #21 on 4 February.¹⁵ The Third Division immediately began to regroup and consolidated its gains.

It was the VI Corps (and Third Division's) intention to defend the gains so recently won against the expected German counterattack.¹⁶ Following a successful defense of the beachhead, the corps believed that operations would shift back to the offensive. The beachhead defense would consist of an initial outpost line following the current front

line of the VI Corps (see map 18). A fall back position along what had been designated the initial beachhead line would now become the final line of resistance. The division designated an intermediate line of resistance, roughly one-half of the distance between the two existing lines, on 5 February.¹⁷

As the terrain occupied by the forward most Third Division units was difficult to defend, General Truscott directed the division to prepare its defensive sector in depth. The current front line trace would be known as the forward outpost line of resistance. The secondary line of resistance would be approximately one-half of way back to the final line of resistance which, for the division, followed the western branch of the Mussolini Canal.¹⁸ The Third Division took its defensive preparations seriously. It was not uncommon during this period for a regiment to have companies or battalions simultaneously working on all three lines of resistance.¹⁹ Engineers and infantrymen emplaced extensive minefields and wire entanglements to slow down or canalize German attackers. The division's engineers even went so far as to build earthen dams along the western branch of the Mussolini Canal to increase its effectiveness as an antitank obstacle.²⁰ It should be remembered that much of this effort transpired during hours of darkness, as the Third remained in plain view of German artillery observers in the Lepini Mountains and Alban Hills during daylight (weather permitting).²¹

Third Division infantrymen and engineers were not the only ones preparing a reception for the Hermann Göring Division and whoever else they brought with them. The artillerymen prepared extensive fire concentrations on virtually all potential enemy assembly areas,

artillery firing positions, and avenues of approach into the division's positions. The signalmen laid communications wire in such a manner that, if Third Division forward observers were unable to communicate directly with their supporting artillery, the calls for fire could be routed laterally through Forty-Fifth Infantry Division switchboards on the Third's left flank and then to the supporting artillery. When the Germans finally attacked in the division's area, the American artillery would prove devastatingly effective.²² General Truscott, in an effort to strengthen the forward positions, directed many of the attached tanks and tank destroyers dug in on the front line. While meeting some initial reluctance from the tankers and tank destroyer crewmen, the results achieved by these armored vehicles against German armor when the attacks finally came proved General Truscott's decision correct.²³

The first test of the Third Division defenses came on 5 February. From the Third's perspective, the German attack uncovered an unforeseen problem with the division's defensive plan. A limited German attack launched against a sector of the forward outpost line of resistance held by the 2d of the 7th forced the battalion to withdraw to the intermediate line of resistance. This withdrawal necessitated a similar withdrawal by the 2d of the 30th in the west to prevent a break in contact with the 2d of the 7th. After analyzing the situation, General Truscott ordered the 7th and the 30th to counterattack to restore the original positions. Both counterattacks were successful. The unforeseen problem with the division defensive plan lay in the attitude of the units tasked to defend the forward outposts. The large amount of effort and resources being expended on the intermediate and

final lines of resistance led the most forward units to believe that their forward positions need not be defended tenaciously, as the main battle would be fought on the other two lines of resistance. This was not General Truscott's intent and he, with his regimental commanders, promptly corrected this erroneous mind state.²⁴ The men of the Third learned quickly. For the remainder of their time within the beachhead, the division's defenses were sometimes dented and bloodied, but they were always quickly regained despite German efforts to the contrary. In late May 1944, when Third Infantry Division began its breakout from the beachhead, the division still held virtually the same forward defensive line it had been on since early February.

Operation FISCHFANG
(16 - 20 February)

The long awaited German counterattack to destroy the beachhead began at 0600 on 16 February with an extensive artillery barrage (see map 19). German infantry and armor attacked along the entire VI Corps front at approximately 0630.²⁵ The attack was a surprise to almost no one. VI Corps knew when it was scheduled to begin as a result of wireless intercepts and prisoner interrogations.²⁶ The German Fourteenth Army assumed that the Allies knew. Despite an admirable attempt to deceive VI Corps as to the timing and location of the attack,²⁷ Allied air reconnaissance enabled the commanders within the beachhead to draw fairly accurate conclusions regarding German intentions.²⁸ The Third Infantry Division's last significant remaining question was would the Cisterna-Nettuno axis be the German main or supporting effort? That was answered shortly after H hour, when it

became obvious that the German artillery barrage in the division's area, violent though it was, was of a lesser intensity than the barrage to the west in the area of the Aprilia-Anzio Road.²⁹ As events would show, the Third would face a German supporting attack across much of the division frontage, not the German main effort.

On the first day, the Third Division faced multiple German attacks ranging in size from a single platoon to two company attacks. A German company reinforced with nine Panzer MK IV tanks attacked and penetrated approximately 300 yards between E Company of the 7th and K Company of the 30th. G Company of the 7th and C Company of the 30th counterattacked to regain E and K's positions. Another German company created a small salient down the Fosso Delle Mole to the left of Company F of the 7th. The Germans were brought under intense fire, primarily artillery, and withdrew by 0930. Company B of the 15th came under attack as did I Company of the 30th. Both companies repelled the Germans. Company-sized German units attacked the 504th(-) at two locations at 0630 and, although some outposts on the eastern bank of the Mussolini Canal were overrun, the Germans did not cross the canal. The paratroopers of the 509th came under attack by a platoon sized unit and successfully drove it off. Companies I and K of the 30th were both attacked by German company sized units during the afternoon and repelled them both.³⁰

An indication of the magnitude of casualties sustained by the German forces attacking the Third Division on the first day is illustrated by the Parachute Demonstration Battalion and the Reconnaissance Battalion of the Hermann Göring Division. Both units

were virtually wiped out, the parachutists lost 110 men and the HG Reconnaissance Battalion, 80.³¹ Most accounts, German and American, attribute a major portion of the credit for stopping the Germans to the Third Division artillery. The skill with which the pre-planned concentrations were developed and executed, as well as the almost limitless (from the German perspective) supplies of ammunition, made the division artillery a force to be feared and hated by the Germans.

Although the Hermann Göring Division received orders during the evening of the 16th to continue to attack on its western flank,³² 17 February was a relatively quiet day in the Third Division sector (see map 20). The only significant attack mentioned in German or Third Division sources was an attack along the 509th and 7th boundary, which was stopped approximately 250 meters north east of Colle del Pozzo (north east of Crocetta) during the evening of the 17th.³³ The 30th Infantry moved off the front line on the 17th and became division reserve, replaced on the line by the 7th Infantry.³⁴ General John W. O'Daniel became the division commander on 17 February, replacing General Truscott, who became VI Corps Deputy Commanding General.³⁵ Hermann Göring Division's orders for the 18th were to pin Third Division down along its entire front starting at 0400 hours.³⁶

Despite the fact that the battle was going reasonably well in the Third Infantry Division sector of the beachhead, the battle was going much less favorably for VI Corps in the western sector (see map 21). The Germans had created an extremely serious salient within the VI Corps lines along the Albano-Aprilia-Anzio road and were in position to break through to the sea. The VI Corps staff, at the urging of General

Truscott, began planning a counterattack to eliminate the German salient. The British, Force T, would attack the western flank of the salient and the Americans, Force H, would attack the eastern flank. The 30th Infantry, Third Division reserve since the 17th, was attached to the First Armored Division (Force H) on the 18th for the planned counterattack north west of Carano.³⁷ Interestingly, as VI Corps was planning the counterattack on the 18th in an attempt to reverse what appeared a strong possibility of German victory, senior German commanders were coming to the conclusion that their attack had failed.³⁸

The 19th of January began with Force H attacking across its line of departure at 0630 into the eastern flank of the Germans (see map 22). Because the British were unable to attack as originally scheduled, the men of the 30th Infantry and their First Armored Division comrades attacked alone. By 0830 they were a mile past the line of departure and continued to advance until halted by intense enemy fires. By 1330 the men resumed the attack and advanced to secure their objective prior to General Ernest Harmon's (First Armored Division commander) orders to halt the advance at 1630. The 30th then consolidated gains won during the counterattack.³⁹ While the 30th and the men of the First Armored were destroying the German salient to the west, the men of the 7th and 509th were successfully repelling German attacks at 1210 and 1545 hours in the Third Division's defensive sector.⁴⁰

The Third Infantry Division continued to hold its defensive positions on the 20th.⁴¹ The beachhead had held, for now, but the Germans would be back again. Aggressive patrolling, probing attacks, reorganization, and further defensive preparations all characterized

Third Division's actions during the next eight days as the division prepared for the next German attack (see map 23). It would begin on 29 February. Unlike Operation FISCHFANG, this time the Third Division would be on the receiving end of the German main effort.

The Germans Try Again
(29 February - 2 March)

Following the complete and abject failure of Operation FISCHFANG, Field Marshal Kesselring did not expect a second attempt to destroy the beachhead to fare any better.⁴² Nevertheless, the potential political and strategic ramifications of a successful destruction of VI Corps were so great for the German cause that OKW directed a second major attack be launched as soon as feasible.⁴³

The Fourteenth Army decided on 22 February that the attack would have its main effort in the Cisterna area.⁴⁴ This would array the preponderance of the German strength against the Third Infantry Division (Reinforced), which was defending from just west of Carano to the Mussolini Canal near Sessano. On 25 February German planners scheduled the attack to begin 28 February.⁴⁵ The major German units assigned the mission to penetrate Third Division's outer beachhead defensive positions were the 362d Infantry Division, the 26th Panzer Division, the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, and the 1028 Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Elements from the 114th Jäger Division planned to capture objectives along the Third Infantry Division/Forty-Fifth Infantry Division boundary in the west and elements from the 16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Reichsführer SS" would capture objectives against the Third Division's eastern flank held by the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment.⁴⁶ On 27

February the Germans delayed the attack until the 29th due to bad weather.⁴⁷

Despite the bad weather which hindered Allied air reconnaissance, VI Corps was able through a variety of intelligence sources to piece together a fairly clear understanding of the German plan.⁴⁸ Despite German attempts to deceive the Allies as to the time and location of the attack,⁴⁹ about the only thing the Third Infantry Division was not sure of was the precise time of the attack. Extensive patrolling, radio intercepts, aerial reconnaissance, and prisoner of war interrogations indicated that the German main effort would be against the Third Division, with supporting German attacks elsewhere along the beachhead to attempt to deceive VI Corps as to the location of the main attack.⁵⁰

While the weather was reducing the effectiveness of Allied air support of the beachhead, it also turned the terrain in front of the Third Division into a quagmire. The mud was so extensive that the Germans had great difficulty moving their armor and artillery into assembly areas prior to the start of the attack. When the attack finally began on 29 February, the German armor was forced to remain on the roads. Any German tank, or for that matter American tank, that ventured off the roads was virtually certain to become hopelessly mired.⁵¹ As a result of additional intelligence gained on 28 February, General Truscott ordered a VI Corps artillery counterpreparation of German assembly areas, command posts, artillery positions, etc., to begin at 0430 on the 29th in an attempt to break up the German attack prior to its start.⁵²

Near dawn on 29 February the German infantry and armor with supporting fires from their artillery began the last major effort to drive VI Corps back into the sea (see map 24). The Germans paid heavily as they attacked the Third Division along its whole frontage. Only in the defensive sector on the division's western portion of the line in the area defended by the 509th did the Germans make a significant gain. In this area, just north east of Carano, the Germans were able to drive a 700 yard deep and 1,000 yard wide salient in the division's defensive line early on the 29th.⁵³ The 2d of the 30th received the mission as part of the division reserve to restore the 509th's original positions. The battalion attacked at 1900 that evening⁵⁴ and by 0130 on 1 March was approximately 1,200 yards north east of the line of departure, where heavy German small arms fire stopped it. The battalion was able to resume the attack at 0545 and was on its objective by 0815.⁵⁵ The 7th, 15th, and 504th were generally successful in repelling numerous German attacks against their respective sectors.⁵⁶

The Germans continued the attack against the Third Division on 1 March but on a much reduced scale.⁵⁷ Most of the fighting that day occurred in the sector defended by the 7th Infantry.⁵⁸ The Germans were surprised by the effectiveness with which the Third Infantry Division counterattacks were pressed home that day.⁵⁹ By nightfall on the evening of 1 March, it was apparent to General Truscott that the Germans had failed.⁶⁰ At 1840 Field Marshal Kesselring sent a message to General von Mackensen halting the major attack and ordering the transition to raids against the beachhead.⁶¹ Limited-scale actions

continued on 2 and 3 March, but the last major German effort to destroy the beachhead was finished.

Situational Summary

On 2 March the weather cleared and American heavy bombers came to the beachhead. As if to emphasize the totality of the German failure, 350 B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators pounded the German positions around the beachhead.⁶² Limited-objective attacks and counterattacks continued as did extensive patrolling, but this phase of the battle was drawing to an end. Both sides had suffered heavy casualties and each of the opposing forces was on the verge of exhaustion. The initiative held by the Germans since the closing days of January had passed from them to the VI Corps.⁶³ While the Third Division and the rest of VI Corps now held the initiative, it would be almost three months before they would be able to capitalize on the fact and break out of the beachhead. The VI Corps did not have the strength to conduct a major offensive by itself without help from the rest of the Fifth Army. At the beginning of March, the Fifth Army was unable to come to the assistance of any major offensive from the beachhead until the Gustav Line was breached. The next phase of the battle of Anzio-Nettuno was beginning, a stalemate that would last until 22 May.

Endnotes

¹Blumenson, 419.

²Wolf Hauser, Major General, with comments by General Eberhard von Mackensen and General Siegfried Westphal. "The Fourteenth Army In Action At Anzio-Nettuno Up To 11 May 1944." Chapter XII of The Campaign In Italy, by General von Vietinghoff. (Foreign Military Study MS#T-1A, CARL, December 1947), 12.

³Kesselring, 195.

⁴Hauser, 8-9.

⁵Siegfried Westphal, General, comments in "The Fourteenth Army In Action At Anzio-Nettuno Up To 11 May 1944." Chapter XII of The Campaign In Italy, by General von Vietinghoff. (Foreign Military Study MS#T-1A, CARL, December 1947), 32.

⁶Hauser, 9.

⁷Ibid., 6.

⁸Kesselring, 195-196.

⁹Hauser, 6, 13.

¹⁰Bond, 201.

¹¹Walter Fries, General, "Commitment of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division During the German Counterattack for the Elimination of the ANZIO-NETTUNO Beachhead in February 1944." (Foreign Military Study MS#D-141, CARL, 1 May 1947), 7.

¹²Bond, 201.

¹³Hauser, 10-11.

¹⁴Starr, 137.

¹⁵Headquarters, VI Corps, "Historical Record, February 1944," (CARL Archival Microfilm Reel 319, Item #1541), 5.

¹⁶Starr, 138.

¹⁷Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 47.

¹⁸Taggart, 122.

¹⁹Ibid.

- ²⁰Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 48.
- ²¹Linklater, 197.
- ²²Truscott, 317.
- ²³Ibid., 316-317.
- ²⁴Ibid., 315-316.
- ²⁵Hauser, 16.
- ²⁶Starr, 147.
- ²⁷"The German Operation at Anzio," 41.
- ²⁸Ibid., 51.
- ²⁹Truscott, 318.
- ³⁰3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, February 1944,"
(CARL Archival Microfilm Reel 319, Item #1542), 3.
- ³¹"The German Operation at Anzio," 53.
- ³²Ibid., 54.
- ³³3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, February 1944," 3.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵Taggart, 442.
- ³⁶"The German Operation at Anzio", 57.
- ³⁷3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, February 1944," 3.
- ³⁸Hauser, 18.
- ³⁹Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 85-86.
- ⁴⁰3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, February 1944," 3.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²Kesselring, 196.
- ⁴³Hauser, 19.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.

- 45"The German Operation at Anzio," 69-70.
- 46Ibid., map between 74-75.
- 47Hauser, 21.
- 48Truscott, 343-345.
- 49"The German Operation at Anzio," 65, 69.
- 50Truscott, 343-345.
- 51Hauser, 21.
- 52Truscott, 344-346.
- 533rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, March 1944," 1.
- 54Ibid.
- 5530th Inf Regt, "Operations Report March 1944," 1.
- 563rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, March 1944," 1.
- 57Starr, 164.
- 583rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, March 1944," 1.
- 59Oberstleutnant i.G. Erich Duensing, "Attack by the 362nd Infantry Division against Anzio-Nettuno from 29 February to 2 March 1944," Foreign Military Study MS#D-198 (CARL), June 1947, 12-13.
- 60Truscott, 347.
- 61"The German Operation at Anzio," 75-76.
- 62Truscott, 347.
- 63Hauser, 22.

CHAPTER 6

STALEMATE

(MARCH - MAY 1944)

Initial Overview

Following the failure of the last major German counterattack against the beachhead, a period of stalemate began which would last approximately two and one-half months. The German Fourteenth Army, battered and frustrated but not broken, would never again seriously threaten the destruction of the beachhead. The men of the Third Infantry Division (and their VI Corps comrades), likewise bloodied and frustrated, were not strong enough in early March to break out of the beachhead without a major supporting attack by the Fifth Army against the Gustav Line¹. Unless the Fifth Army was able to either successfully reduce the German fortifications at Cassino or turn the defenders out of their positions by means of a successful envelopment, a breakout from the beachhead in isolation ran the very real risk of placing VI Corps and the Third Division in an untenable position.

This phase of the battle was characterized by extensive patrolling and numerous small-unit limited-objective attacks by both sides.² Despite the absence of major attacks by the opposing forces, soldiers continued to be killed, wounded, and captured on a dishearteningly extensive and regular basis. The German artillery regularly shelled the beachhead and made life miserable for the GIs.³

They enjoyed the advantages of excellent observation and fields of fire provided them as a result of their possession of the Alban Hills and Lepini Mountains overlooking the beachhead. Artillerymen of the Third Infantry Division made life almost unbearable for the Germans with masterful artillery techniques, an almost limitless supply of ammunition, and the aerial forward observation capability provided by artillery spotter aircraft.⁴

The generally poor weather, especially during the early part of the stalemate, increased the importance placed upon infantry patrolling and field artillery. A reduced aerial reconnaissance capability forced the Third Division to rely even more heavily than normal on patrols for intelligence gathering. The Germans, lacking any credible aerial reconnaissance found themselves forced to rely heavily on patrolling since virtually the beginning of the Italian Campaign. Poor flying weather for fighter-bombers frequently reduced the close air support available to Third Infantry Division and magnified the importance of the field artillery. While the Germans occasionally received support at the beachhead from their air force (Luftwaffe), the overall effect of the bad weather on close air support was favorable to the Germans, as it reduced the flying days available to the far more prevalent U. S. fighter-bombers. During the latter part of the stalemate, as the weather improved and the ground started to dry out, cross country mobility improved somewhat for the armored vehicles of both sides. This would be of importance to the now complete First Armored Division (Combat Command B rejoined the division during this phase of the

battle)⁵ and the German mobile reserves poised to oppose any attempt at a breakout from the beachhead.

German Actions

Despite the utter failure of the two major assaults against the beachhead, the Germans planned another major assault to begin 29 March. Interestingly, the plan called for an attack down the Albano-Anzio or Cisterna-Nettuno axis, virtually the same avenues of approach for the two previous major attacks. While to the casual observer this plan might smack of a lack of creativity on the part of the Germans, they were in fact forced into this situation for the very same reasons as before.⁶ A lack of cross country mobility for their armored vehicles⁷ and Allied naval gunfire from the Tyrrhenian Sea virtually ruled out all other avenues of approach for a German attack.

The Germans postponed the planned attack on 23 March and ultimately canceled it on 10 April. The overriding factor which seems to have decided the issue was German battlefield strength. During the period of stalemate, Army Group C pulled units from Fourteenth Army to bolster Tenth Army on the Gustav Line as well as to form an Army Group mobile reserve. Consequently, General von Mackensen thought his Fourteenth Army was too weak to conduct the 29 March attack alone. He believed the mobile reserve held by Field Marshal Kesselring must be committed to the attack if it were to achieve the desired outcome. Field Marshal Kesselring, trying to balance competing demands (Tenth Army versus Fourteenth Army versus Army Group C) for scarce resources, chose to retain the mobile reserve and hence maintain his flexibility

for the Allied spring offensive.⁸ Adding further to Field Marshal Kesselring's reluctance to commit his mobile reserves was his belief that the Allies would attempt further amphibious operations on the Tyrrhenian coast as part of a renewed offensive against the Gustav Line or an attempt to secure Rome.⁹ As a result, Fourteenth Army was forced to remain on a generally defensive posture and resort to the small unit limited objective attacks which so characterized this phase of the battle. Fourteenth Army designed these attacks to straighten the German lines, gain terrain which would strengthen the German defense, or force VI Corps back onto unfavorable terrain in an attempt to reduce the size of the beachhead to a more manageable size.¹⁰

Fourteenth Army and Army Group C knew VI Corps would attempt a breakout in conjunction with the Fifth Army spring offensive on the Gustav Line. The unanswered question for the Germans was "when?"¹¹ Realizing the Fourteenth Army had a limited amount of time to prepare for its defense, General von Mackensen set about building up his defenses while resting and training his troops. The Germans strengthened defensive positions along likely VI Corps attack routes out of the beachhead and prepared them in depth.¹² General von Mackensen's field artillery stockpiled ammunition with the result that German units were forced to supplement their rations with local foodstuffs as scarce transportation resources were diverted from hauling rations to hauling ammunition.¹³ Fourteenth Army developed and implemented plans for training and resting its soldiers. Most front line units were able to rotate off the line for ten days after three weeks in the line. The ten days were not, however, devoted solely to rest. Units rotating off the

line conducted extensive training in an effort to get their new replacements up to at least minimal standards of proficiency. Considering the number of German casualties sustained so far in the battle, this undoubtedly posed a significant challenge to the officers and NCOs. In addition to the training conducted during the off-line time, units were put to work constructing additional field fortifications and switch lines to add depth to the army's defenses.¹⁴

Third Infantry Division Actions

During the period of stalemate the Third Division, like its opponents, conducted rather extensive patrols, limited objective attacks, and formidable training programs designed to prepare the division for its role in the upcoming breakout from the beachhead. The division sent out patrols to pinpoint German positions and capture prisoners, keep the Germans on edge, and maintain an offensive state of mind within Third Division infantrymen. The Third Division launched limited objective attacks to obtain more favorable terrain for the planned breakout, inflict casualties on the enemy, and keep him off balance.¹⁵ Two notable small unit limited objective attacks carried out by the division during this phase of the battle were Operation MR. BLACK (see map 25) and Operation MR. GREEN (see map 26). Both operations provide fine examples of this type of operation for future study.¹⁶ Third Division's training program during the stalemate occurred primarily during two periods out of the front line. The first period, from late March to mid-April, occurred after relief in the front lines by the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division. The second period, from late

April until the breakout, followed relief by the Forty-Fifth Infantry Division.¹⁷

The correlation of combat power at the beachhead gradually shifted in favor of VI Corps during the stalemate. While German replacements, largely unblooded and under trained, were sent to Fourteenth Army in an attempt to rebuild its strength,¹⁸ the withdrawal of most stronger German units to the Gustav Line or to form a mobile reserve affected the overall Fourteenth Army strength in a negative way.¹⁹ On the other hand, the period of stalemate was an opportunity for VI Corps and the Third Infantry Division to build up their strength in preparation for the spring offensive. The 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, and 4th Ranger Battalion pulled out of the beachhead to prepare for other missions.²⁰ Despite the loss of these five battalions, the arrival of the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division with its three infantry regiments and division artillery as well as Combat Command B of the First Armored Division more than compensated for the withdrawal of the paratroopers and rangers.²¹ In addition to the arrival within the beachhead of these powerful units, substantial numbers of individual soldier replacements arrived to bring Third Division (and other units) back up to strength.²²

During the first training period from late March to mid-April, the division concentrated on shortcomings noted during the previous German attacks.²³ It is not surprising that problems were identified during the defense; it was after all, the first time in the war that Third Division had been forced to switch from the offense to a defensive posture.²⁴ The division conducted the bulk of the training in the

southeast sector of the beachhead in a wooded area known as "the Pines," approximately three miles east of Nettuno.²⁵ Soldiers received training in both combat and known distance marksmanship, operation of German weapons, and employment of flame throwers. In addition, the men trained in patrolling techniques, pillbox and bunker reduction, and limited objective attacks during hours of darkness. Selected individuals participated in additional marksmanship and fieldcraft training to prepare them for employment as snipers. The training also included techniques and procedures for both the emplacement and removal of land mines. The chain of command placed a great amount of emphasis on military discipline and courtesy as well as soldierly bearing.²⁶

In mid-April the Third Infantry Division relieved the Forty-Fifth Infantry Division in the front lines for approximately two weeks, enabling the Forty-Fifth to rest and train for its part in the upcoming breakout. While in the line, the Third Division retained a division reserve, which continued rigorous training to maintain the fighting edge built up during the previous training.²⁷ Following the movement of the Forty-Fifth back into the line in late April, Third Division moved back to "the Pines." There they began final training oriented almost exclusively on offensive operations and intended to bring the men to the peak of combat efficiency for their key role in the imminent breakout.²⁸ The men worked on perfecting coordination between infantry and tanks in the attack, fire and maneuver across ground devoid of cover and concealment, and attacking across or through wadis. The division placed further emphasis on street fighting and the reduction of pillboxes and bunkers.²⁹ At least one of Third Division's regiments, the 7th,

conducted live fire training in Nettuno in preparation for their forthcoming assault of Cisterna.³⁰ Soldiers practiced demolition and landmine warfare in anticipation of assaulting through German protective obstacles. Acknowledging that the division's experiences since January may have dulled the men's physical and mental edge, the division's leadership developed physical hardening and mental toughening programs to ensure that the Third Division lived up to its reputation when it crossed the line of departure.³¹

This last period of training prior to the breakout was important for one other reason. For the large number of replacements who had joined the division since early March, this was the last opportunity for indoctrination in Third Infantry Division methods and procedures prior to the division going on the offense. If the newcomers were not part of the team by the time they crossed the line of departure, their chances of surviving the next phase of the battle were dramatically reduced.

While it might appear that March, April, and May were devoted almost exclusively to training, that is not entirely correct. General "Iron Mike" O'Daniel ordered companies rotated out of the front lines for two day rests starting on 8 March. It was the first chance in weeks for most of the men to get a good night's sleep, clean uniforms, a shower, and hot food.³² The rest and rehabilitation program continued after the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division relieved the Third Infantry Division. When the men were not training in "the Pines," there were opportunities to play baseball, swim or fish in the sea, see motion pictures at the theater, listen to phonograph records, or visit the barber. There was also time for cleaning and maintaining personal

equipment and to repaint helmets with the Third Division insignia.³³ Commanders conducted award ceremonies to present decorations for valor in the presence of comrades. There was even a naturalization ceremony conducted within the beachhead, where thirty-seven Third Division soldiers were awarded their American citizenship.³⁴

Situational Summary

In May, as the Fifth Army began its long anticipated spring offensive against the Gustav Line, it became obvious to both the Germans and the men of the Third Division that the breakout attempt was imminent. The VI Corps had developed four plans at General Clark's direction. Operation CRAWDAD would have resulted in a northwesterly advance along the coast on the Ardea-Rome axis. Operation GRASSHOPPER was a planned advance on the Littoria-Sezze axis to facilitate a link-up with the Fifth Army to the south east of the beachhead. Operation TURTLE would advance from Carroceto to Campoleone and Albano, and then to Rome. The fourth plan, the one the men of the Third Division would actually execute, was Operation BUFFALO.³⁵ This plan directed an assault through Cisterna, an advance to Cori, and the cutting of Highway 6 at Valmontone, with the Third Infantry Division serving as the VI Corps main effort.³⁶

During the final days before the breakout, planning and training reached a climax. Officers and Noncommissioned Officers of the Third Division conducted rehearsals using huge relief terrain boards and terrain mock-ups of the actual ground they would assault.³⁷ The engineers began to create gaps in the division's protective minefields

to facilitate the advance of infantrymen and tankers as they began their assault.³⁸ The Third Division training had been as extensive and realistic as possible and was similar in most aspects to the first rate training which had prepared the division for its successful assaults at Sicily and Anzio. The men of the Third, seasoned veteran and newly arrived replacement alike, were as well prepared for the coming operation as any soldier going into combat could reasonably expect.

The German soldiers on the other side of the front line were likewise as ready as they were going to be. They had prepared their defenses and field fortifications in depth, completed what rest and training they were going to receive, and built up their almost pitiful supplies of artillery ammunition. The improving weather did not bode well for German fortunes. The drying ground would improve cross country mobility for Third Infantry Division tanks and clearing skies would increase the effectiveness of fighter-bombers flying in support of the Third.

At 1715 hours on 21 May, General Truscott received orders from General Clark that Operation BUFFALO would begin at 0630 on 23 May.³⁹ After leading the VI Corps ashore on D Day four months prior, Third Infantry Division would once again lead the corps as it fought to break out of the beachhead and advance on Valmontone to cut the German Tenth Army line of retreat. It was fortunate that Third Infantry Division had been able to conduct the extensive and first class training while out of the front lines. As the men of the Third Division crossed the line of departure early on the 23d, many had just witnessed their last sunrise on earth. Their assault would be successful, but on 23 May 1944 the

Third Infantry Division would suffer the bloodiest single day of combat of any U. S. Army division during the war.⁴⁰

Endnotes

- ¹Allen, 121.
- ²Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 105.
- ³Ibid., 113.
- ⁴"The German Operation at Anzio," 84.
- ⁵Martin Blumenson, Anzio: The Gamble That Failed (New York: Curtis Books, 1963), 236.
- ⁶Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 105.
- ⁷"The German Operation at Anzio," 92.
- ⁸Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 105-106.
- ⁹"The German Operation at Anzio," 78, 81, 90, 101.
- ¹⁰Hauser, 22-24.
- ¹¹Kesselring, 197-198.
- ¹²Hauser, 22.
- ¹³"The German Operation at Anzio," 87.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 82-83.
- ¹⁵Truscott, 360.
- ¹⁶Prohme, 155, 160.
- ¹⁷Truscott, 352-353.
- ¹⁸Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 116.
- ¹⁹"The German Operation at Anzio," 78, 82.
- ²⁰Truscott, 352.
- ²¹Blumenson, 236.
- ²²Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 107.
- ²³Prohme, 152.
- ²⁴Taggart, 139.
- ²⁵Sheehan, 176.

- 26Prohme, 152.
- 273rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, 11 April - 1 May 1944," 1.
- 28Prohme, 165.
- 293rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, May 1944," 1.
- 30Taggart, 148.
- 31Prohme, 165.
- 32Taggart, 139.
- 33Prohme, 145, 148-149, 165.
- 34Taggart, 142.
- 35Truscott, 366.
- 36VI Corps Field Order 26, "Operation BUFFALO," 061600 May 44, (CARL), 1.
- 37Prohme, 167.
- 38Taggart, 148.
- 39Truscott, 371.
- 40Taggart, 150, 164.

CHAPTER 7

BREAKOUT

(23 MAY - 2 JUNE 1944)

Initial Setting

On 11 May the US Fifth Army began the much anticipated spring offensive against the Gustav Line. Cassino, linchpin of the German defenses, fell on 18 May.¹ It was time for VI Corps to begin final preparations for the last act of the tragic drama that had been Anzio-Nettuno. The VI Corps plan for the breakout, Operation BUFFALO, called for the Third Division to isolate and reduce Cisterna. The VI Corps units were then to seize the high ground in the vicinity of Cori and advance on Artena and cut Highway 6 near Valmontone.² In an effort to surprise the German defenders, General Truscott ordered the Third Infantry Division to advance from its training area in the Pines to attack positions under the cover of darkness. The VI Corps staff estimated it would require the darkness of two nights to complete the movement of troops and equipment into final assault positions. The VI Corps notified General Clark that it needed forty-eight hours warning when the time came for the attack.³ After several minor delays, General Clark's staff gave notice to VI Corps; the breakout was to begin at 0630 on the 23d of May.

The men of the Third began their movement into attack positions during the evening of 21/22 May. They established local defenses and

camouflaged their positions. Their leaders supervised final precombat checks of weapons and equipment.⁴ Engineers began clearing lanes in friendly minefields to the front of the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division.⁵ The ground before them was the same ground they had tried to cross in January during the assault on Cisterna. Much remained the same, but much had changed. The ground, wet and muddy in January, was now firm enough to permit the employment of armored vehicles off the roads.⁶ While the ground before Cisterna had offered little cover or concealment in January and still provided little cover in May,⁷ spring grasses and grain provided at least a hint of concealment for the infantrymen this time.⁸ The ground beyond Cisterna was more broken and would provide some cover during the movement northeast toward Cori. Olive orchards in the area afforded a degree of concealment as well.⁹

A massive artillery preparation lasting forty-five minutes covered the movement of Third Infantry Division's assault battalions as they prepared to cross the line of departure at 0630 on the 23d.¹⁰ The VI Corps' artillery had been firing daily concentrations for some time, trying to deceive the Germans as to the actual start of the breakout. This had been occurring on such a regular basis that the Germans grew somewhat complacent.¹¹ On 23 May, VI Corps achieved complete tactical surprise. German artillery was slow to get into the fight.¹² As terrible as the 23d of May would be for the infantrymen of the Third, it could have been even worse if the German artillery had been brought to bear as the Third crossed the line of departure.

German Defenses

The men of the 362d and 715th Infantry Divisions had used their time wisely during the stalemate. Extensive field fortifications had been prepared in anticipation of the breakout attempt. In Third Infantry Division's area of operations, the enemy main line of defense was approximately 500 yards in front of the Third's front line. The Germans had prepared a system of platoon defensive positions approximately 300 to 500 yards apart and with interlocking and mutually supporting fields of fire. Large numbers of automatic weapons were incorporated into these positions. Squad-sized outposts filled gaps and covered dead space between platoon positions. Landmines and barbed wire in great quantity would canalize attacking infantry and armor into pre-determined killing zones. The German reserve line was 300 to 500 yards to the rear of the main line of defense and included numerous dugouts, trenches, and gunpits.¹³ The regimental command post of the grenadier regiment defending Cisterna was located in a wine cellar deep underneath the center of town and almost impervious to all but a direct infantry assault.¹⁴

Despite their impressive defensive positions, the German defenders were almost preordained to fail on 23 May, the result of four factors the common soldier and junior officer could in no way affect, no matter how great their valor. First, as a direct result of previous casualties and the German inability to replace them, the 362d and 715th were forced to man their positions far below optimal strength. Grenadier companies in the 362d were down to about thirty-five men and both divisions were down to six battalions of infantry each.¹⁵

Secondly, the 362d division staff understood that a successful defense against a determined American attack in their sector was only possible if strong reserves were available quickly. Only one regiment in the 362d had the luxury of a battalion in reserve.¹⁶ The majority of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's reserves had already been committed on the Tenth Army front when the Third Infantry Division began the breakout on 23 May. The only divisional-sized reserve available to the Fourteenth Army was the Hermann Göring Division near Livorno, at the time undergoing refit and guarding the coast against an expected Allied amphibious assault.¹⁷ Approximately 350 kilometers lay between the Hermann Göring and the beachhead. When the time to march arrived, American fighter-bombers would make the division pay for every kilometer.¹⁸

Thirdly, the Germans were almost hopelessly outgunned in field artillery. In addition to the severe shortage of artillery ammunition, which had plagued them throughout most of the battle, the losses of artillery pieces to air attack by Allied fighter-bombers were now truly being felt. Most of the remaining German artillery on 23 May could not conduct effective counterbattery fire.¹⁹

Finally, as a result of disagreement between Field Marshal Kesselring and General Eberhard von Mackensen as to where the VI Corps main attack would occur, arguably the two weakest German divisions surrounding the beachhead (362d and 715th Infantry Divisions) found themselves in the path of the Third Infantry Division making the VI Corps main attack. Field Marshal Kesselring believed the VI Corps main attack would be toward Valmontone with the objective of cutting Highway

6. General von Mackensen was not persuaded and remained firm in his belief that the main attack would be up the Albano Road with the objective of taking the Alban Hills and approaching Rome along Highway 7.²⁰ As a result, General von Mackensen placed his strongest units along the western part of the beachhead and his weaker units in the middle and eastern parts.²¹ In view of the resistance the 362d and 715th Divisions would offer the Third Division on 23 May, one can only speculate how events would have unfolded had the 3d Panzer Grenadier, 4th Parachute, and 65th Infantry Divisions been defending Cisterna against the Third Infantry Division, instead of defending against secondary and diversionary attacks to the west of the main attack.²²

Third Infantry Division Attack

The Third Infantry Division attacked across the line of departure at 0630 on the 23d of May following a forty-five minute artillery preparation.²³ The division assaulted with three infantry regiments abreast, the 30th on the left, the 7th in the center, and the 15th on the right (see maps 27 and 28).²⁴ All three regiments advanced with two battalions forward and one in reserve.²⁵ Men of the 30th Infantry assaulted generally along the axis of the Ponte Rotto road. The 7th attacked toward Cisterna along the Isola Bella road and the 15th advanced on the 7th's right flank.²⁶ Attacking on the division's left flank was the First Armored Division; on the Third's right flank were the Canadians and Americans of the 1st Special Service Force.

On the morning of the assault, as the men of the Third Division passed through the front line of the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division,

negotiated the previously cleared lanes in the friendly minefields, and advanced towards the German defenses, they were superbly trained and conditioned. At least one regimental history suggests the state of training and conditioning on 23 May matched that of D Day at Sicily.²⁷ Third Division units also received extremely accurate intelligence on German positions as a result of extensive patrolling, prisoner interrogation, and aerial reconnaissance prior to the attack.²⁸

Despite possessing the advantage of surprise, well-rested and trained troops, excellent intelligence, as well as superior artillery and air support, the Third Division became engaged in the fight of its life on 23 May near Cisterna. A persistent haze further reduced the efficiency of the German artillery, limiting observation by German artillery spotters in the mountains.²⁹ The haze, unfortunately for the infantrymen and tankers of the Third, did not have the same effect on the well-positioned German automatic weapons in strongly fortified positions.³⁰ The shortage of German antitank weapons, deemed serious by the German 362d Infantry Division commander,³¹ was at least partly offset by an abundant use of landmines. The German use of landmines in numbers heavier than anything previously encountered by Third Infantry Division³² separated the tankers from the infantrymen they were supporting.³³ As a result, infantrymen were forced to destroy many German strongpoints with small arms fire, that could have been destroyed relatively easily at far less cost in American blood, if the tanks had been able to engage the German positions.

Within the Third Division, 7th Infantry was to capture Cisterna. Attacking into fierce enemy resistance before the town,³⁴ its lead

elements found themselves pinned down and unable to advance almost immediately after crossing the line of departure. Two and one-half hours later they were still stalled.³⁵ The 30th Infantry, on the left flank, also advanced headlong into strong enemy machine gun and small arms fire, but was able to make some progress.³⁶ On the division's right flank, the 15th Infantry employed its battle sled team (semi-protected individual sleds towed in column behind tanks) in a limited objective attack.³⁷ While all three regiments suffered heavy casualties the first day of the attack, the 30th and 15th were able to advance further on the 23d than the 7th, which was destined to fight house-to-house, street-to-street in Cisterna. As the attack continued on 24 May, the 30th and 15th Infantry on each flank bypassed and encircled Cisterna.³⁸ The men of the 7th Infantry finally cleared the town in the early evening of 25 May.³⁹

While the 7th was digging the defenders of Cisterna out of their positions, the remainder of the division continued to advance on Cori.⁴⁰ The 3d Recon Troop entered Cori during the afternoon of the 25th.⁴¹ By the night of 25 May, elements of the Third Division were among the scrub oak and bare rocks in the high ground around Cori.⁴² By morning of 26 May, all three of the infantry regiments had advanced to the vicinity of Cori.⁴³ The division next set its eyes on Artena, overlooking Highway 6, and Valmontone.

Mid-morning on the 26th, the Third Division launched its attack towards Artena through the Velletri Gap.⁴⁴ A division reconnaissance patrol reached the outskirts of Artena just past 1200.⁴⁵ The estimate of the enemy situation contained in Third Infantry Division Field Order

#10 of 26 May expected the Germans to delay back until reaching the Velletri-Artena defensive line. Once defensive positions were occupied there, the Germans were expected to defend with elements of the 334th Infantry, 352d Infantry, 715th Infantry, and Hermann Göring Panzer Divisions.⁴⁶ At least one Third Division regiment reported little enemy resistance between Cori and Artena. The 15th observed that once the enemy main line of resistance had been penetrated, German resistance fell off considerably.⁴⁷ It appears that while Third Division understood prior to D Day that the German defenders facing it were somewhat weakened in infantry strength, the true magnitude of the German personnel replacement problem was not fully appreciated. The 15th Infantry also observed that enemy resistance from artillery (to date, somewhat less than had been expected) increased during this time.⁴⁸ One possible explanation is improved visibility for forward observers with the improved weather starting 24/25 May.⁴⁹ Another explanation could be a realization on the part of German artillerymen that it was now "use it or lose it" time for any ammunition they had been able to stockpile. Late in the afternoon of the 26th, as the 7th Infantry advanced toward Artena, it engaged troops from the Hermann Göring Reconnaissance Battalion.⁵⁰ The rest of the division was not far behind. That evening the Third Division moved onto the high ground to the south and west of Artena and prepared for the morning assault.⁵¹

No major organized German resistance stood between the Third Division and Valmontone on 26 May. The Hermann Göring Division was enroute from Livorno, but for the time Valmontone was vulnerable. General O'Daniel reported to General Truscott on the evening of the 26th

that "This area is very soft . . . I'm convinced we could go into Rome, if we had more stuff up here."⁵² Unfortunately for the Third Infantry Division, Fifth Army issued verbal orders and followed them up with written orders early on the 26th, shifting the VI Corps attack from Valmontone to the Alban Hills and Rome.⁵³ The Third Division and 1st Special Service Force were to continue the advance to Valmontone by themselves, while the remainder of VI Corps in effect shifted from Operation BUFFALO to an attack that closely resembled General von Mackensen's original estimate of VI Corps intentions.

Artena fell to the 15th Infantry around 1200 on the 27th.⁵⁴ The Third deployed for defense against a possible counterattack from the direction of Velletri and began preparations for continuation of the attack to Valmontone.⁵⁵ With the capture of Artena by the division, Highway 6 was under direct observation by field artillery forward observers. Although Valmontone had not yet been captured and no infantry or armor had physically crossed Highway 6, it was cut in a very real sense by the heavy artillery (8-inch guns and 240-mm howitzers) displacing forward from the beachhead and firing on targets identified by the forward observers in and around Artena.⁵⁶

Enemy counterattacks by elements of the Hermann Göring Division near Artena during the evening of the 27th disrupted the Third's preparations for continuation of the attack to Valmontone.⁵⁷ As a result of increasing German resistance and counterattacks, the Third spent 28, 29, and 30 May on the defense.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the field artillery remained active during this time and continued offensive fires against Highway 6 and Valmontone.⁵⁹ After six difficult days of

fighting and extremely heavy casualties, Third Infantry Division was rapidly running out of infantrymen to continue the offensive. During the night of 28/29 May, the infantry battalions received between 150 and 200 replacements per battalion.⁶⁰ The division would soon be ready to resume the attack. On 30 May the Third Division came under the control of II Corps, as VI Corps continued its assault toward Rome.⁶¹ At 0500 on 1 June, Third Infantry Division resumed its attack to cut Highway 6 and seize Valmontone.⁶² The Third Division encountered strong enemy resistance,⁶³ indicating that once again the Germans had made good use of the time provided as a result of the division's loss of momentum on the 27th. The four day pause allowed the Hermann Göring Division to close with additional elements and establish defensive positions, albeit hasty positions. The Hermann Göring defenders established defenses between the railroad south of Valmontone and Highway 6. As a direct result of the heavy infantry casualties sustained during the earlier counterattacks which had bought them precious time but at heavy expense, the Hermann Göring was forced to rely primarily on self-propelled artillery, tanks, field artillery, and multiple rocket launchers in lieu of infantry. Another factor accounting for the relatively weak infantry defense was the width of the defensive sector, which forced the Germans to dissipate their infantry.⁶⁴

The Third Division finally reached Highway 6 late on 1 June.⁶⁵ Valmontone fell the next morning, 133 days after Operation SHINGLE began.⁶⁶

The German Defense

Although surprised by the assault on 23 May, the soldiers of the 362d and 715th Infantry Divisions fought back furiously and exacted a horrible toll on the Third Division. By the afternoon on the 23d, the acting commander of the 362d (the division commander of the 362d was on leave in Germany on the 23d of May)⁶⁷ had been forced to commit his last reserves.⁶⁸ Field Marshal Kesselring believed the VI Corps main attack to be in the direction of Cisterna and tried to convince General von Mackensen to shift part of the 92d Infantry Division from the I Parachute Corps sector to the central sector of the LXXVI Panzer Corps. Fortunately for the men of the Third Infantry Division, General von Mackensen remained convinced the main attack would be launched toward the Alban Hills along the Albano Road and refused.⁶⁹ The first day of the Third Division attack cost the 362d fifty percent of its combat strength. The 1028th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the 725th Grenadier Regiment (both from the 715th Infantry Division) each lost forty percent of their combat strength. A third regiment from the 715th, the 735th Grenadier Regiment, lost ten percent of its strength as well.⁷⁰

The terrible fighting continued the next day. At 0600 on the 24th aerial reconnaissance spotted elements of the Hermann Göring Panzer Division 35 to 40 miles north of Rome. The units were advancing rapidly toward the south.⁷¹ The 362d planned a counterattack against the Third Division to relieve Cisterna, but the assault was delayed until the 25th, when it met with no success.⁷² In Cisterna grenadiers from the 362d valiantly fought the Third Division's 7th Infantry for every foot of ground taken. By holding up the advance of the 7th and forcing the

15th and 30th Infantry to expose their flanks as they advanced on either side of Cisterna, the defenders bought time for their division to reorganize its defenses somewhat and for reinforcements to begin arriving.⁷³ General Heinrich Greiner (commander of the 362d) returned from Germany to his division command post northwest of Velletri on the 24th. He found his division battered and forced back from its original main line of resistance.⁷⁴ It was obvious to him that divisional-sized reinforcements were needed to counter the Third Division's breakthrough of his defenses on both sides of Cisterna. General Greiner soon realized that despite the beating his division and the 715th had taken, they would have to hold on until the Hermann Göring arrived. There was no one else to hold the line; all other reserves had been committed to support the Tenth Army.⁷⁵

During the evening of 25 May Field, Marshal Kesselring sent word to General von Mackensen that the Hermann Göring's reconnaissance battalion was enroute to reinforce him. The remainder of the division was not to be committed upon arrival, pending a decision on possible attachment to Tenth Army.⁷⁶ The next day Army Group C informed General von Mackensen that the Hermann Göring would be assigned to the Fourteenth Army for commitment with LXXXVI Panzer Corps. Army Group C made it clear that the division be employed as a unit, not piece meal.⁷⁷ The night of 26/27 May saw the 362d pull back to prepared defensive positions on either side of Velletri. The positions had been prepared during the stalemate at the beachhead in March and April.⁷⁸ Mounting infantry casualties forced the 362d to rely heavily on its field artillery. Numerous well-sited observation posts on the high ground

aided General Greiner's artillery as it fought desperately to halt the Third Division's advance.⁷⁹

It was Field Marshal Kesselring's intention to commit the Hermann Göring Division in the vicinity of Valmontone en masse. While the principle of mass is certainly desirable, it is to General Wilhelm Schmalz's (commander of the Hermann Göring Division) credit that he took the initiative to commit his subordinate units as they arrived on the battlefield.⁸⁰ Had his division not counterattacked the Third Infantry on 27 May, it is likely that the Third would have advanced from Ardena to Valmontone before the Germans could establish a credible defense. As a result of costly counterattacks on the 27th and successive days, the Third Infantry Division was thrown temporarily off balance, and the Hermann Göring Division bought time for defensive preparations to continue.⁸¹

The success of the Hermann Göring's efforts against Third Division from 27 through 31 May is somewhat surprising when one considers that, in addition to being committed piecemeal, the units were severely understrength prior to actually engaging the Third Division. Allied fighter-bombers had taken a terrible toll of men and equipment as General Schmalz and his division advanced toward the battlefield.⁸²

During the morning of 1 June the Third Infantry Division began its final assault to capture Valmontone. Both divisions, Third Infantry and Hermann Göring Panzer, engaged in combat one final time. The fighting was fierce and the Third's advance to Valmontone slow until

near midnight. By then, the decision was no longer in question. Valmontone fell to the Third Infantry on the morning of 2 June.⁸³

Situational Summary

Following the capture of Valmontone, the Third Division advanced to the vicinity of Cave and Palestrina. Fighting continued against scattered German resistance until late on 5 June, when the division was relieved from combat and assigned to garrison Rome. The Third would stay in Rome until 14 June. From mid-June until mid-August the division underwent training similar to that which had prepared it for Operation HUSKY, the advance to the Winter Line, Operation SHINGLE, and the breakout from the beachhead.⁸⁴ On 15 August 1944, the Third Infantry Division would storm an enemy held beach for the last time in Operation DRAGOON (invasion of Southern France).

Fighting rear-guard actions northward past Rome until the middle of June, the Hermann Göring Division was pulled out of the line on 15 June. On 24 July the division left Italy and headed toward Warsaw in an attempt to influence the outcome of the developing crisis on the eastern front.⁸⁵ The Hermann Göring fought the remainder of the war against the Russians, being almost completely destroyed in the process.⁸⁶

General Greiner's 362d Infantry Division was rebuilt during the summer of 1944 from grenadier regiments of the 92d Infantry Division. The 362d saw action on the Gothic Line, finally being encircled and forced to surrender in late April 1945.⁸⁷ Likewise, the 715th Infantry Division was rebuilt following its heavy losses and fought on the Gothic

Line. Early in 1945 the 715th was sent to the eastern front, where it fought and eventually surrendered in Czechoslovakia.⁸⁸

Endnotes

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- ²VI Corps, "Field Order #26 (with annexes)," 061600B May 44, 1.
- ³Truscott, 367.
- ⁴3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 211201 to 221200 May 1944."
- ⁵Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino To The Alps, United States Army In World War II Series, (Washington, D.C.: Center Of Military History, United States Army, 1977), 118.
- ⁶Taggart, 154.
- ⁷Izenour, 5.
- ⁸Taggart, 154.
- ⁹Izenour, 5.
- ¹⁰3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 May 1944."
- ¹¹Fisher, 115.
- ¹²Starr, 233.
- ¹³Izenour, 5.
- ¹⁴Fisher, 132.
- ¹⁵Heinrich Greiner, Generalleutnant, "Battle for Rome and retreat northward, 1944. (362.I.D.)." (Foreign Military Study MS#D-169 (CARL), 28 May 1947), 4, and Taggart, 155.
- ¹⁶Greiner, 4-5.
- ¹⁷Otte, 113.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 117.
- ¹⁹Fisher, 111.
- ²⁰Ibid., 107.
- ²¹Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 119.

- 22 "The German Operation at Anzio," map between pages 118 and 119.
- 23 3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 May 1944."
- 24 Izenour, 6.
- 25 Taggart, 156, 160-161.
- 26 3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, May 1944," 1.
- 27 Prohme, 168.
- 28 Taggart, 153.
- 29 Fisher, 122.
- 30 Taggart, 155.
- 31 Greiner, 4.
- 32 Taggart, 164.
- 33 Fisher, 131.
- 34 3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 May 1944," 2.
- 35 Fisher, 133.
- 36 3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 221201 to 231200 May 1944," 1.
- 37 John B. Shirley, I Remember: Stories of a Combat Infantryman In World War II, (Livermore, CA: Camino Press, 1993), 5-13.
- 38 Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 119.
- 39 7th Inf Regt, "Report of Operations May 1944" (CARL Archival Microfilm Reel 319, Item #1545), 1.
- 40 3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 241201 to 251200 May 1944," 1.
- 41 Starr, 238.
- 42 15th Inf Regt, "Summary of Operations May 1944" (CARL Archival Microfilm Reel 319, Item #1546), 1; and Fisher, 109.

⁴³3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 251201 to 261200 May 1944," 1.

⁴⁴Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 119.

⁴⁵3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 251201 to 261200 May 1944," 1.

⁴⁶3d Infantry Division "Field Order #10," 26 May 1944, 1.

⁴⁷15th Inf Regt, "Summary of Operations May 1944," 2.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 241201 to 251200 May 1944," 1.

⁵⁰Fisher, 168.

⁵¹3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 261201 to 271200 May 1944," 1.

⁵²Fisher, 168.

⁵³Linklater, 277.

⁵⁴15th Inf Regt, "Summary of Operations May 1944," 2.

⁵⁵3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 261201 to 271200 May 1944," 1, 3.

⁵⁶Starr, 244.

⁵⁷15th Inf Regt, "Summary of Operations May 1944," 2.

⁵⁸Starr, 244.

⁵⁹3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 281201 to 291200 May 1944," 1.

⁶⁰Taggart, 176.

⁶¹Anzio Beachhead 22 January - 25 May 1944, 121.

⁶²3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, June 1944," 1.

⁶³3d Infantry Division, "G3 Report File for 311201 May to 011200 June 1944," 1.

⁶⁴15th Inf Regt, "Summary of Operations June 1944," 1-2.

- ⁶⁵Linklater, 282.
- ⁶⁶3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, June 1944," 1.
- ⁶⁷Fisher, 127-128.
- ⁶⁸Fisher, 139.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., 139-141.
- ⁷⁰"The German Operation at Anzio," 107.
- ⁷¹Prohme, 180.
- ⁷²Greiner, 8.
- ⁷³Ibid., 9.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., 3.
- ⁷⁵Fisher, 151.
- ⁷⁶"The German Operation at Anzio," 110.
- ⁷⁷Ibid., 111.
- ⁷⁸Greiner, 11.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., 13.
- ⁸⁰Fisher, 169.
- ⁸¹Ibid., 170.
- ⁸²Greiner, 15.
- ⁸³3rd Inf Division, "Summary of Operations, June 1944," 1.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., 1-2.
- ⁸⁵Otte, 117.
- ⁸⁶Mitcham, 392.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., 245.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., 313.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Throughout history there have been military units which, finding themselves in a desperate situation, have risen to the challenge and performed their duty in a truly superb manner. The Third Infantry Division at the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead is one such unit. No less formidable opponent than Field Marshal Albert Kesselring is reported to have rated the Third Infantry as one of the two finest American divisions he fought during the war.¹ Despite opinions regarding the success (or lack thereof) of Operation SHINGLE, an inescapable conclusion remains that the Third Infantry Division performed its duty magnificently and, with the exception of the failure to capture Cisterna in late January, accomplished every significant assigned mission within the beachhead.

Several key factors appear to have played a major role in contributing to the Third Division's success; most were present to varying degrees during all phases of the battle, both offensive and defensive. Constant throughout the battle was the quality and relative stability of the senior leadership at division and regimental level. General Truscott was able to put together a winning team in North Africa and hold it together through Sicily and the initial combat in Italy. General O'Daniel was successful in maintaining the high standards of

leadership after his assumption of command of the division on 17 February 1944. While stability and continuity of leadership at the battalion and company level was not nearly so high as at higher levels, due primarily to heavy casualties, the quality of the junior leadership was, by almost all accounts, more than adequate.

While in no way downplaying the accomplishments of the men of the Third, and without forgetting the valor of the individual German soldiers and their units, it must be concluded that the Third Infantry Division was aided at Anzio-Nettuno by failures and missteps on the part of the higher German command. The inability of the Germans to provide sufficient quantities of trained and experienced replacements, especially infantrymen, ensured the Third Division's ability to mass overwhelming combat power at the point of its choosing. The German plan to conduct a supporting attack, vice the main attack, against the Third Division in Operation FISCHFANG and the operation's failure ensured the division time to prepare formidable defenses prior to the German counterattack in late February. With only one notable exception, the German inability to stop aerial and ground reconnaissance missions meant that the leaders of the Third Division were able to develop plans, both defensive and offensive, with fairly accurate intelligence. The only significant German success in this area was the undetected movement of elements of the 26th Panzer Division and the Hermann Göring Panzer Division to the area around Cisterna in late January, just prior to the Third's attempt to capture it.

The true hero of the battle in the opinion of many Third Division infantrymen was the field artillery. One can easily conclude

that without its four battalions of field artillery (the 10th (Light), 39th (Light), 41st (Light), and 69th (Armored)), the division would have been sorely pressed in its defense during February and March or during the breakout in May. The absolutely masterful ability to mass fires on targets in a timely manner, the ability to expend lavish amounts of ammunition on targets, and the quiet professionalism of the artillery forward observers and pilots of the spotter planes earned the respect and awe of the German defenders. One thing is for certain, many a Third Division infantryman entering Rome in early June 1944 owed his life to the artillerymen of the division.

The fourth factor of major significance to the Third Infantry Division's success at Anzio-Nettuno was the division's policy of rotating units out of the front lines for rest, refitting, and training. Taking advantage of every opportunity, the division conducted intensive and highly demanding training prior to the D Day assault, as well as within the beachhead itself, notably just prior to the German counterattack in late February and during preparations in April and May for the breakout. While it was not unusual for most divisions to rotate their units out of the front lines for rest and training, what was unusual was the almost incredible efficiency with which the Third Infantry Division was able to accomplish it. As a result, at virtually every critical point during the battle individual soldiers and their units had the advantage of having recently undergone high quality training and being fairly well rested. The Germans attempted a similar policy, but met with substantially less success.

Other factors in the Third Infantry Division's success, not necessarily as critical, but significant nonetheless, include the weather and Allied air superiority. The weather, and resultant mud, proved equally detrimental to off-road mobility for armored vehicles of both sides during most of the battle. During the German counterattack of February and early March, this fact favored the Third Infantry Division and its defense, as the Germans were not able to mass significant armored combat power to seriously threaten the division's defenses. The Germans were forced to rely heavily on their infantry for assaults against the Third Division and were decimated in the process by the division's field artillery. In late May when General O'Daniels' division began its second attempt to capture Cisterna, the weather had cleared and the ground dried somewhat. Improved off-road mobility for the division's armored vehicles contributed to better close-in support by tanks of the infantry than had been the case during the first assault against Cisterna in January.

Most credible sources conclude that air interdiction in support of Operation SHINGLE did not accomplish anything near the results promised by its proponents. Nevertheless, it must be concluded that the Allied air superiority benefited the Third Infantry Division in at least three ways. The air superiority allowed artillery spotter planes to operate with only minimal interference from the Luftwaffe. The spotter planes were able, to a degree, to counteract the observation advantage enjoyed by the German artillery forward observers in the Alban Hills and Lepini Mountains. This helped the Third Infantry Division to more effectively bring to bear the superior American artillery tactics and

ammunition advantage. During periods of weather suitable for aerial reconnaissance missions, air superiority allowed the Third Division to supplement its own intelligence gathering patrols and prisoner of war interrogations with first rate aerial reconnaissance. With the exception of the nasty surprise at Cisterna in late January, the Third Division was never seriously deceived by the Germans at Anzio-Nettuno. Aerial reconnaissance unquestionably aided the division G2 in this accomplishment. Stubborn as the Hermann Göring Division's defense before Valmontone was, it would have been even tougher had it not been seriously weakened during its forced march from Livorno to the beachhead by Allied fighter-bombers in late May.²

Recommendations for Future Research

While one can only speculate what might have occurred, it would be fascinating to examine the possible effects of the planned airborne assault by the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment on the German attempt to seal off the beachhead, had the airborne assault been executed. A careful analysis of the German plan to seal the beachhead and the American plan for the airborne operation, as well as the actual execution of the German plan, might well add additional weight to those who argue that Operation SHINGLE might well have lived up to its potential, had only it been executed in a less cautious manner.

Another potential area for future research is the topographical engineering support available for planning Operation SHINGLE. A total of seven 1:50,000 map sheets are referenced in Third Infantry Division's field order for SHINGLE. All seven had been prepared in 1942 or 1943 by

US Army topographers based on Italian maps dating as far back as 1878. What effect, if any, this dated information had on the Third Infantry Division once it was actually ashore might prove interesting.

A study of 1944 US Army doctrine as it related to the principle of war known as mass should prove insightful. When analyzed in terms of modern US Army doctrine, it could be argued that the Third Infantry Division failed to properly employ the principle of mass during its assault on Cisterna in late January. By attacking with increasingly larger units over a period of days, culminating in a failed reinforced divisional assault, instead of massing the reinforced division against Cisterna at the beginning, time was lost enabling the Germans to strengthen their defenses. Was the Third Division's attack at Cisterna in January doctrinally correct in terms of the principle of mass by 1944 doctrine?

If the British infantry division in the initial landing on 22 January was in fact the "weaker sister" in combat power when compared to the Third Infantry Division, why was the British unit placed on the left flank, closest to Rome and astride what was obviously the most logical high speed avenue of approach for a German counterattack into the beachhead or for a VI Corps advance to the Alban Hills?

Recently declassified documents from the German side should prove useful in any effort to learn the truth about the real effectiveness of the Hermann Göring Division. American units which faced the division are lavish in their praise for its toughness and elite status, as are former members of the unit itself. There are just enough lukewarm comments regarding the division in the observations of

several very highly regarded German officers of impeccable credentials to cause one to suspect that the truth may be somewhere in between.

It would be useful to study the Third Infantry Division's experiences in Sicily, when the division was heavily reinforced with attachments to determine if that experience significantly aided General Truscott's staff planning during the early stages at Anzio-Nettuno when the Third Division once again found itself heavily reinforced on the beachhead.

And finally, further research into the truly amazing staff work by Field Marshal Kesselring's staff, as well as the superbly professional efforts by the German commanders to execute the plans for the rapid sealing off of the beachhead, would almost certainly provide worthwhile material for study by today's contingency planners in our army.

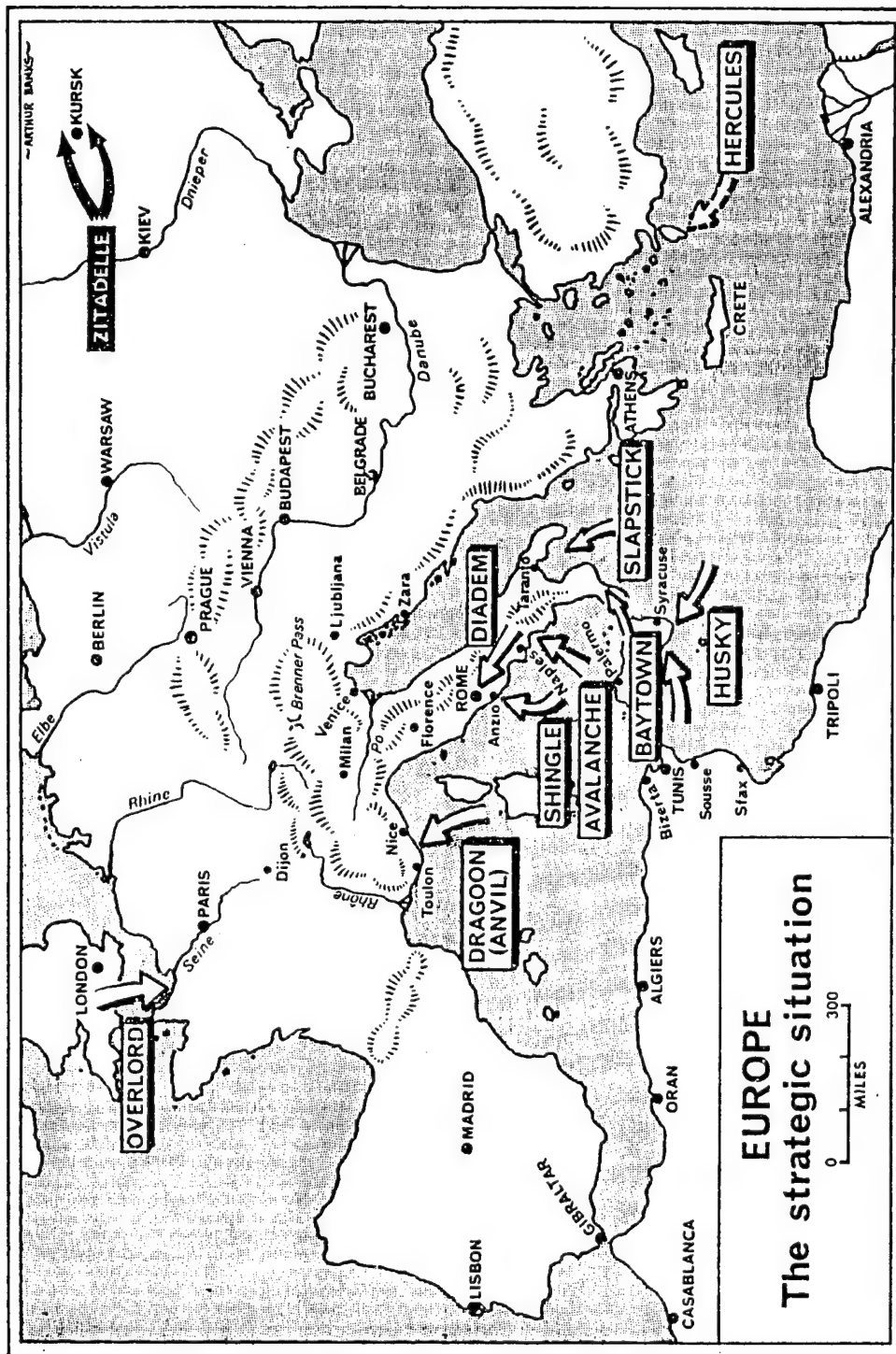
Endnotes

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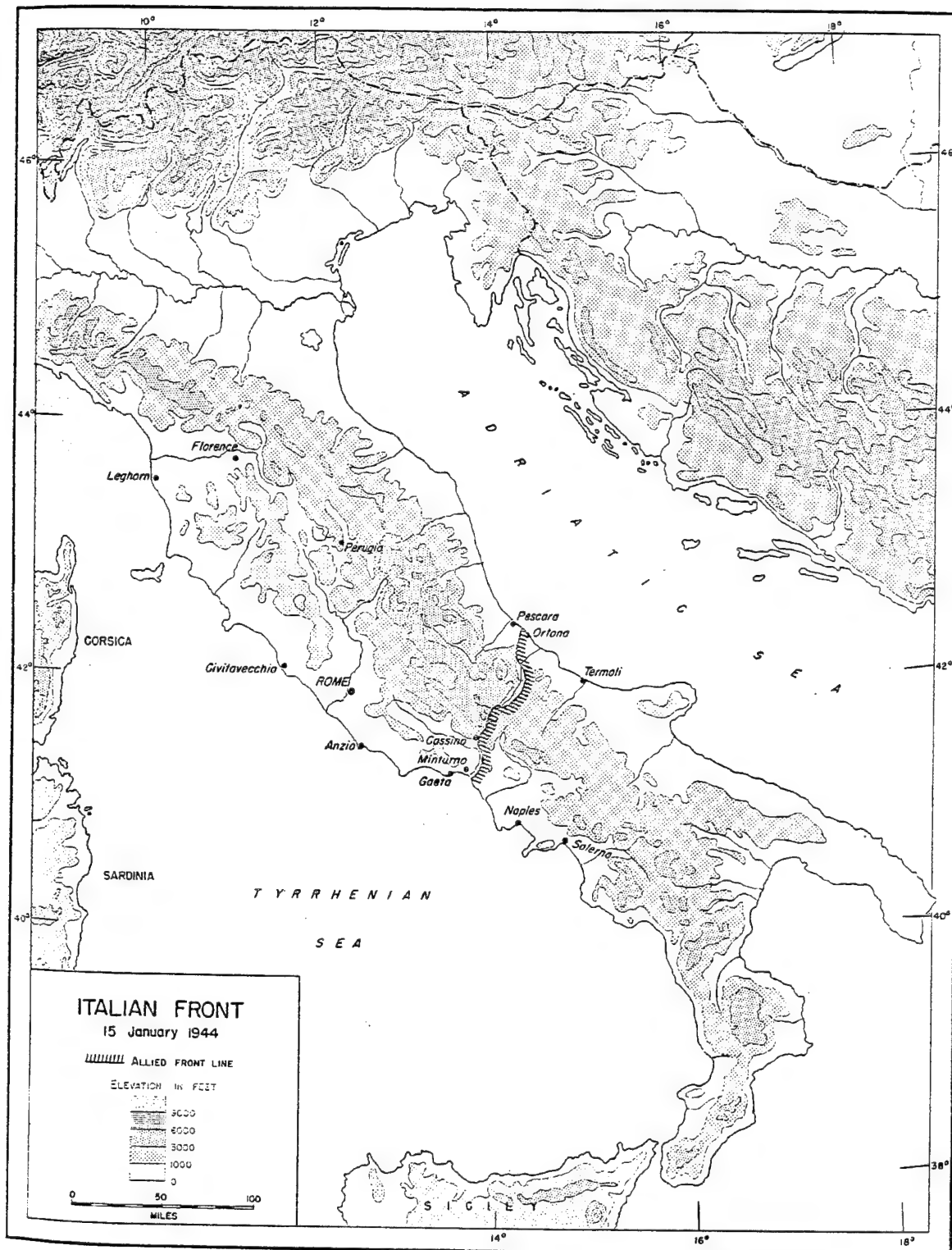
²Greiner, 15.

APPENDIX

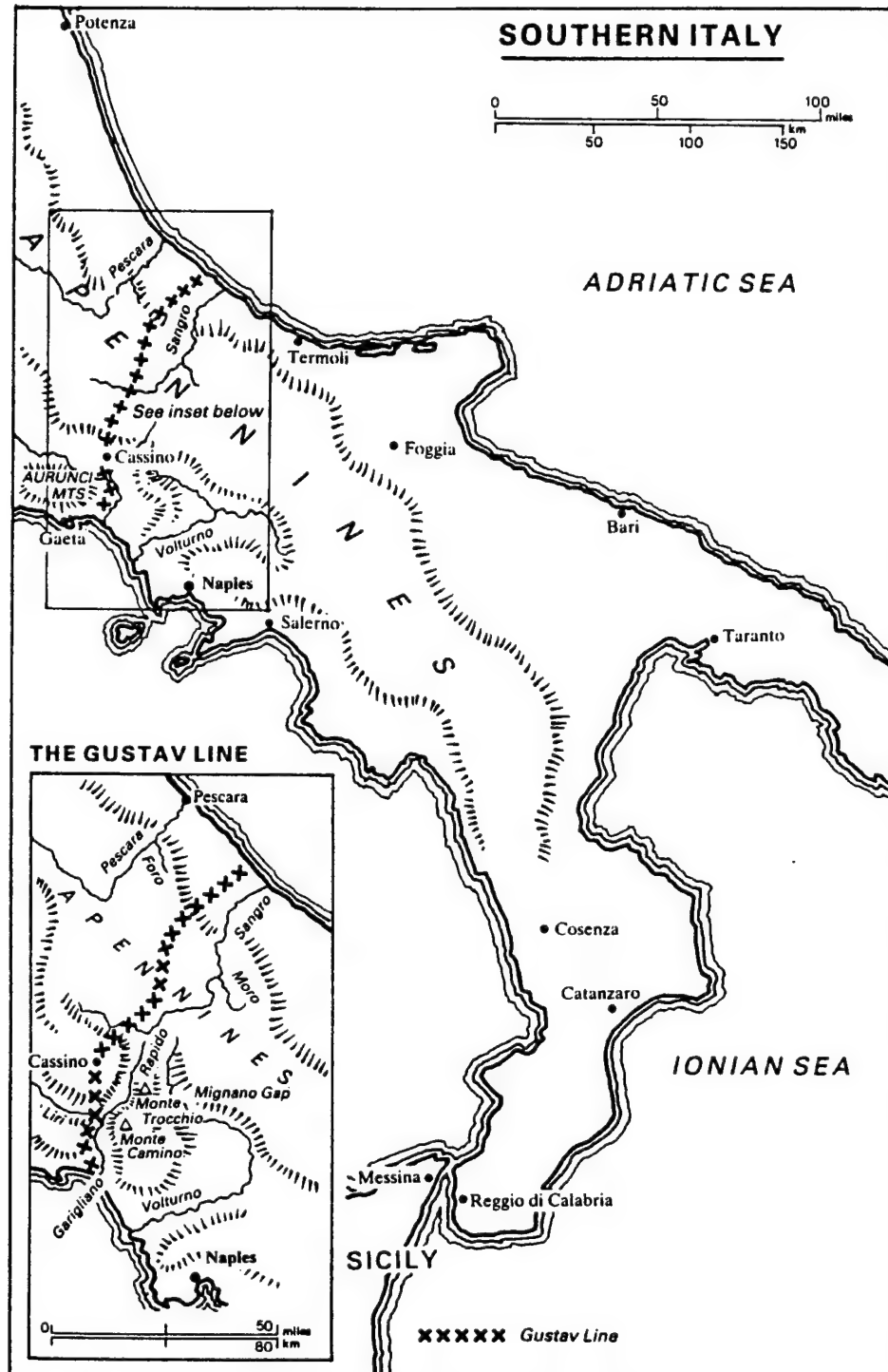
MAPS



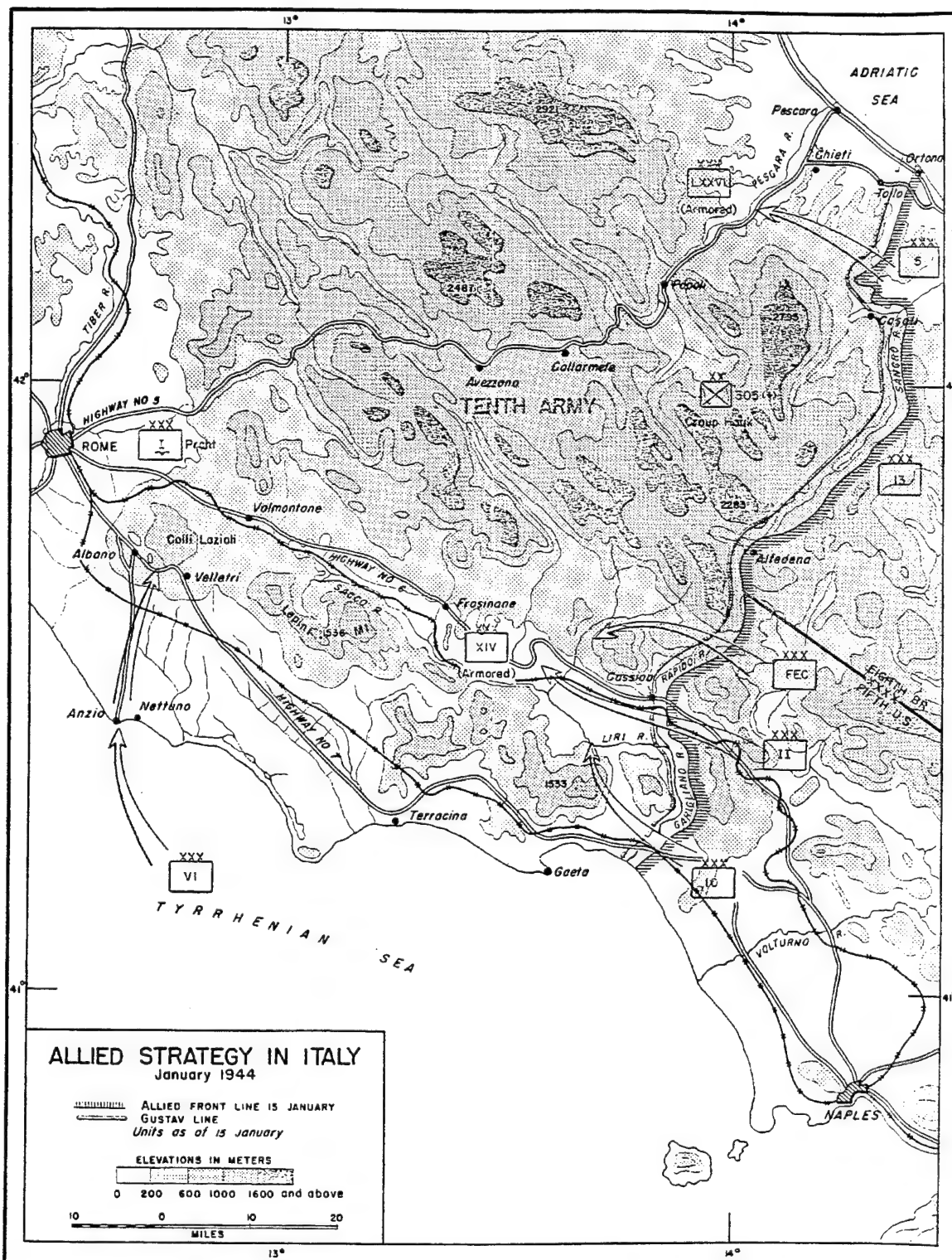
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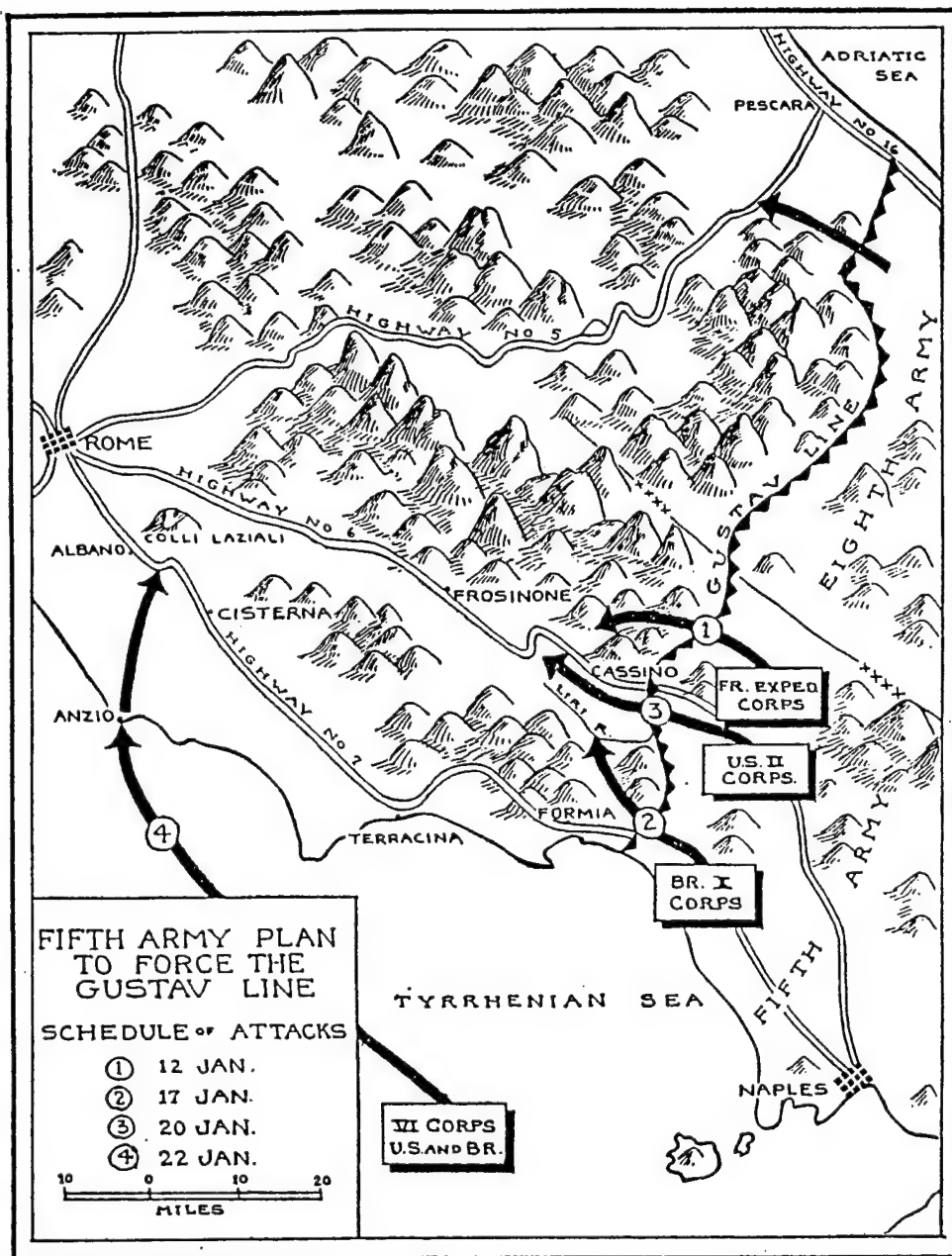
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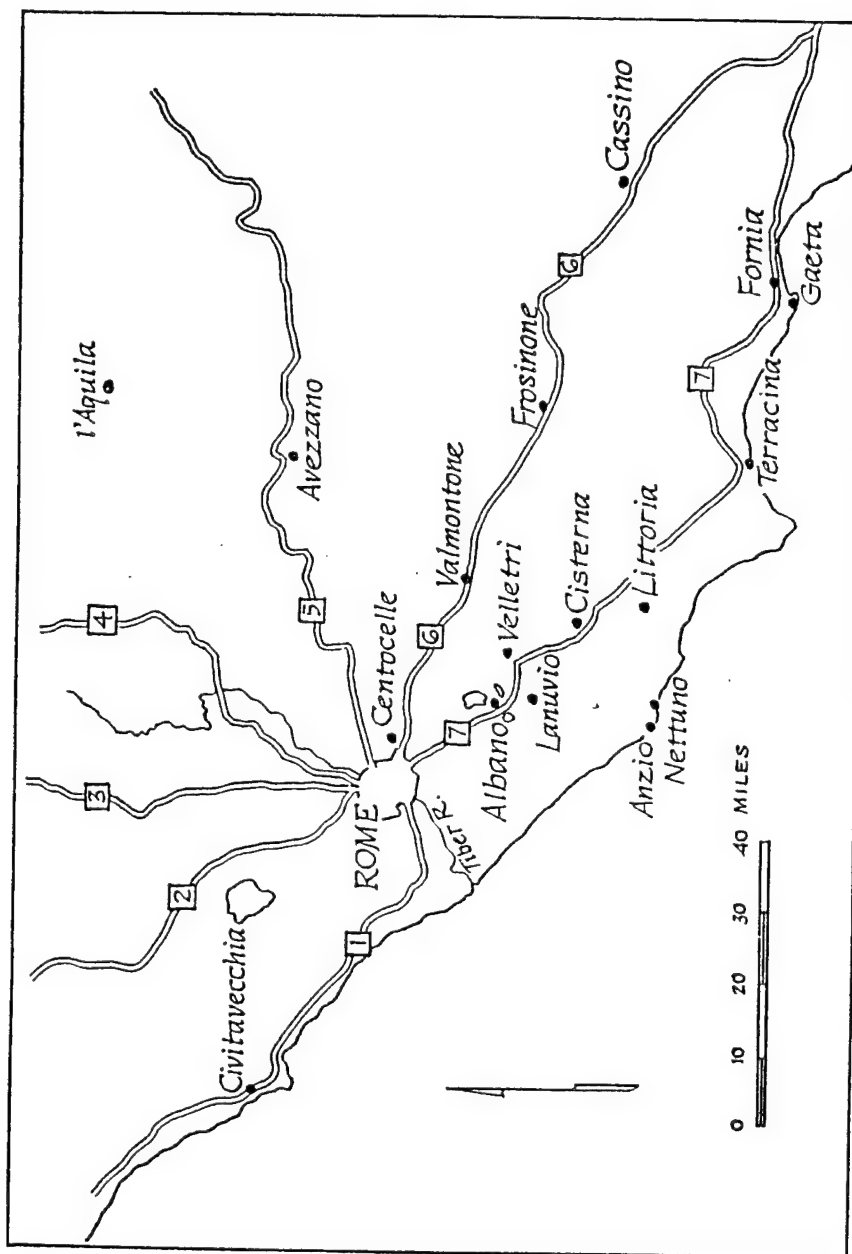
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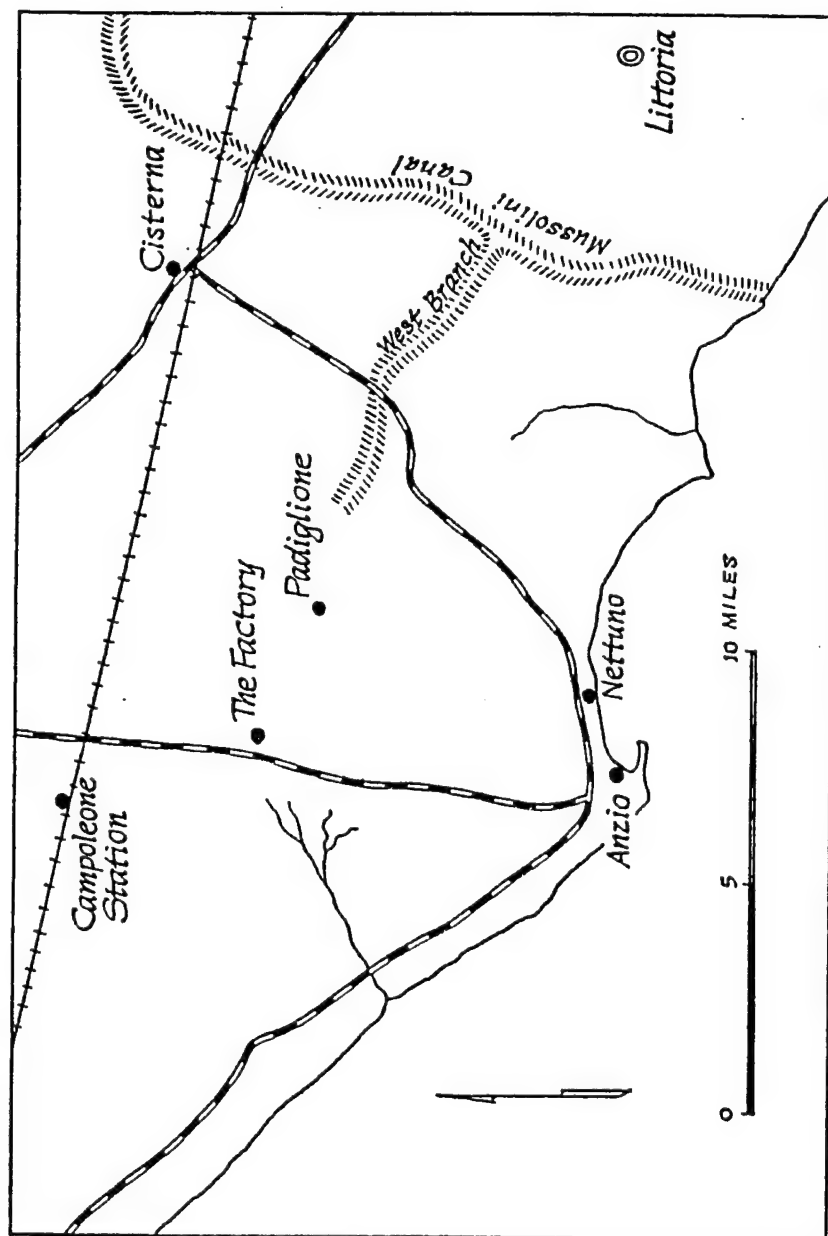


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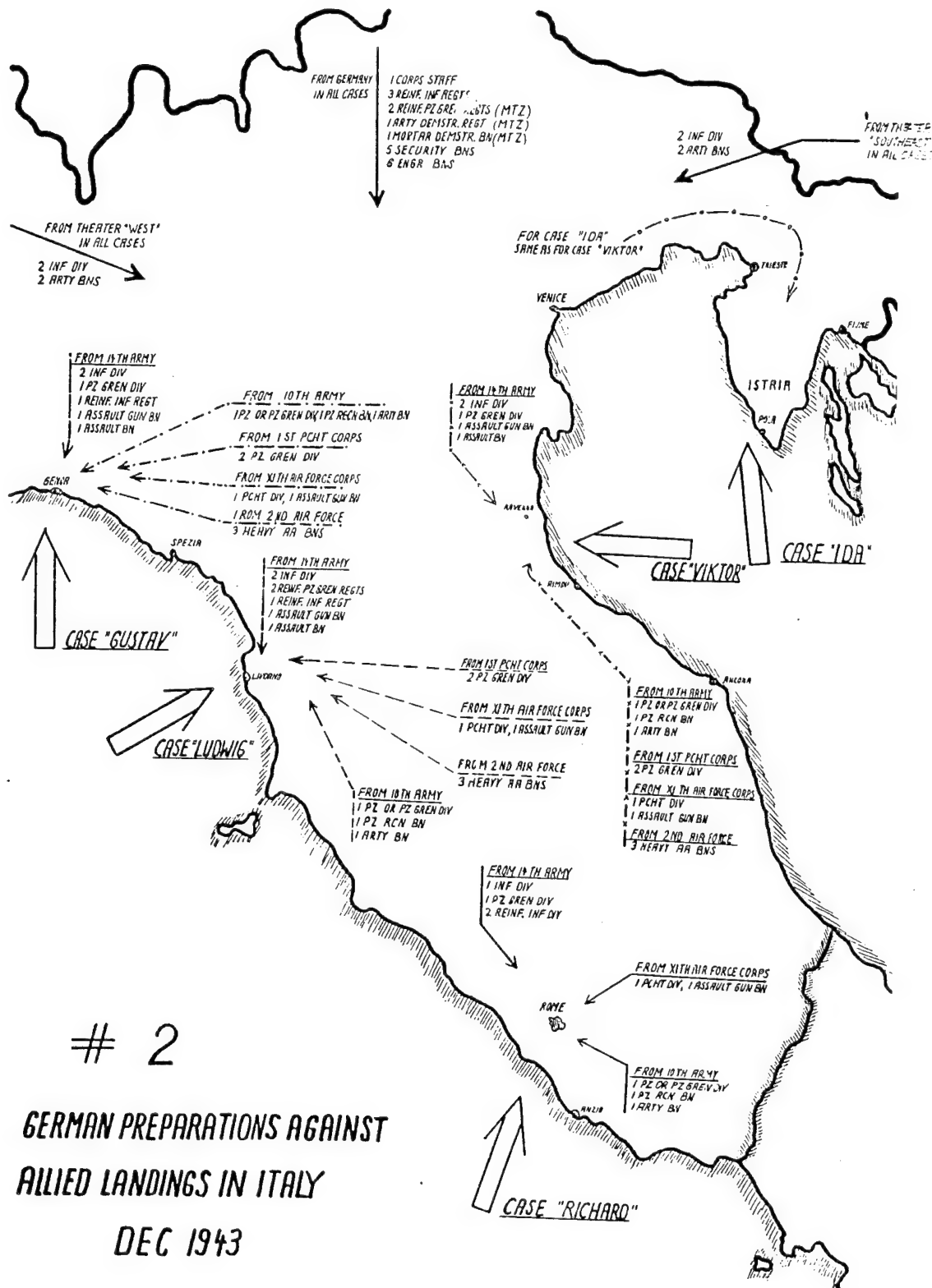
The Roads to Rome

Map 6. Reprinted, by permission, from Fred Sheehan, Anzio Epic of Bravery (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1964), 193.

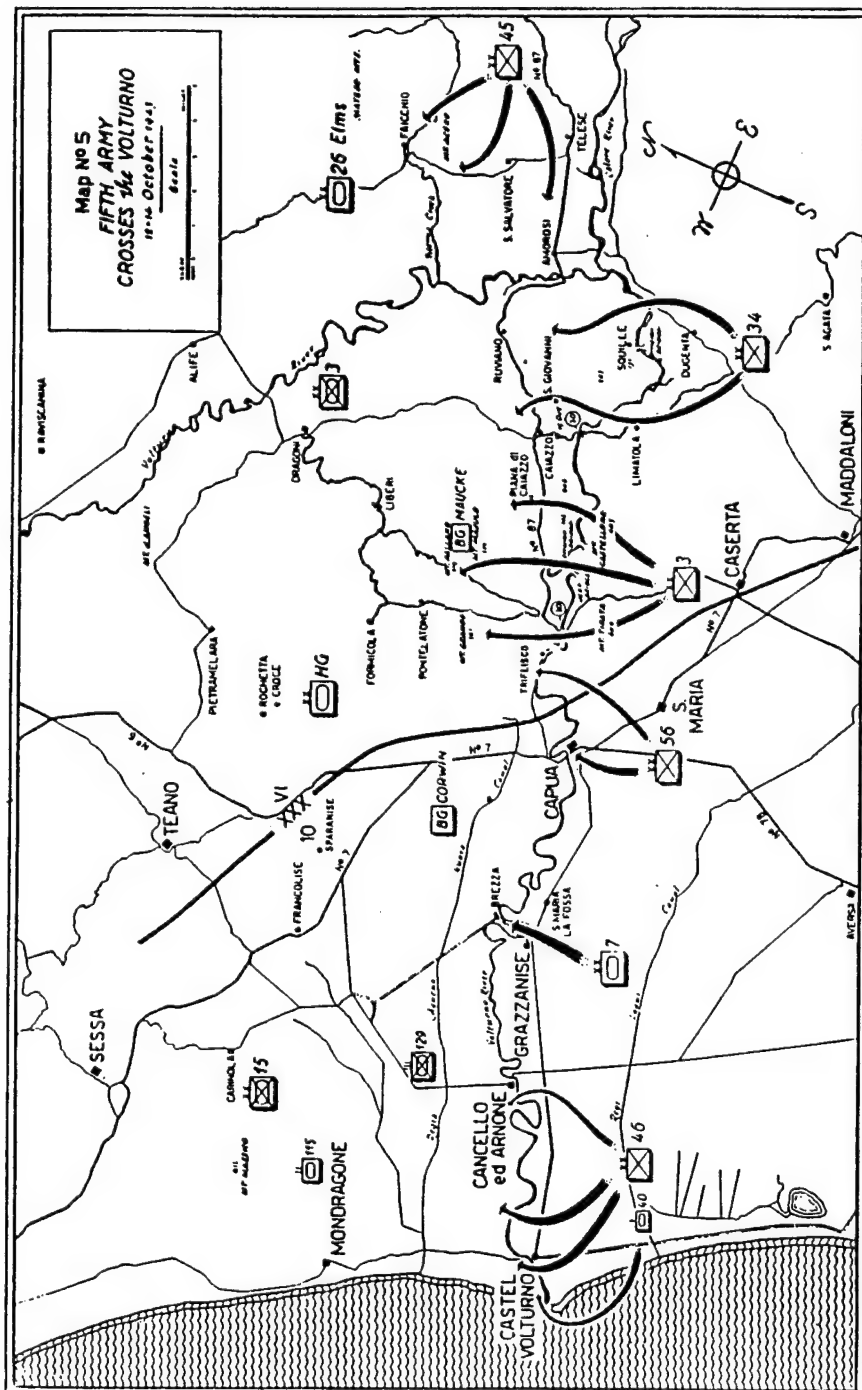


Roads out of Anzio

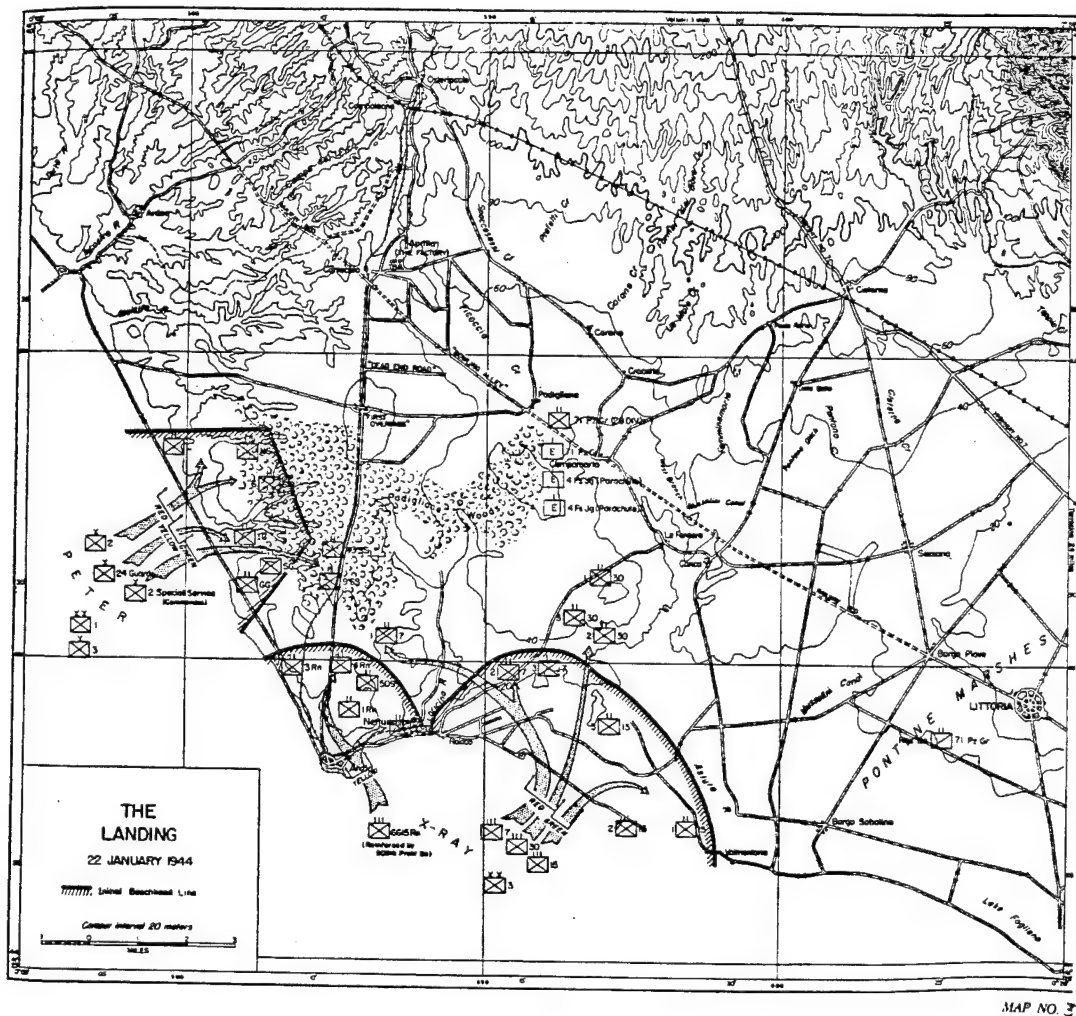
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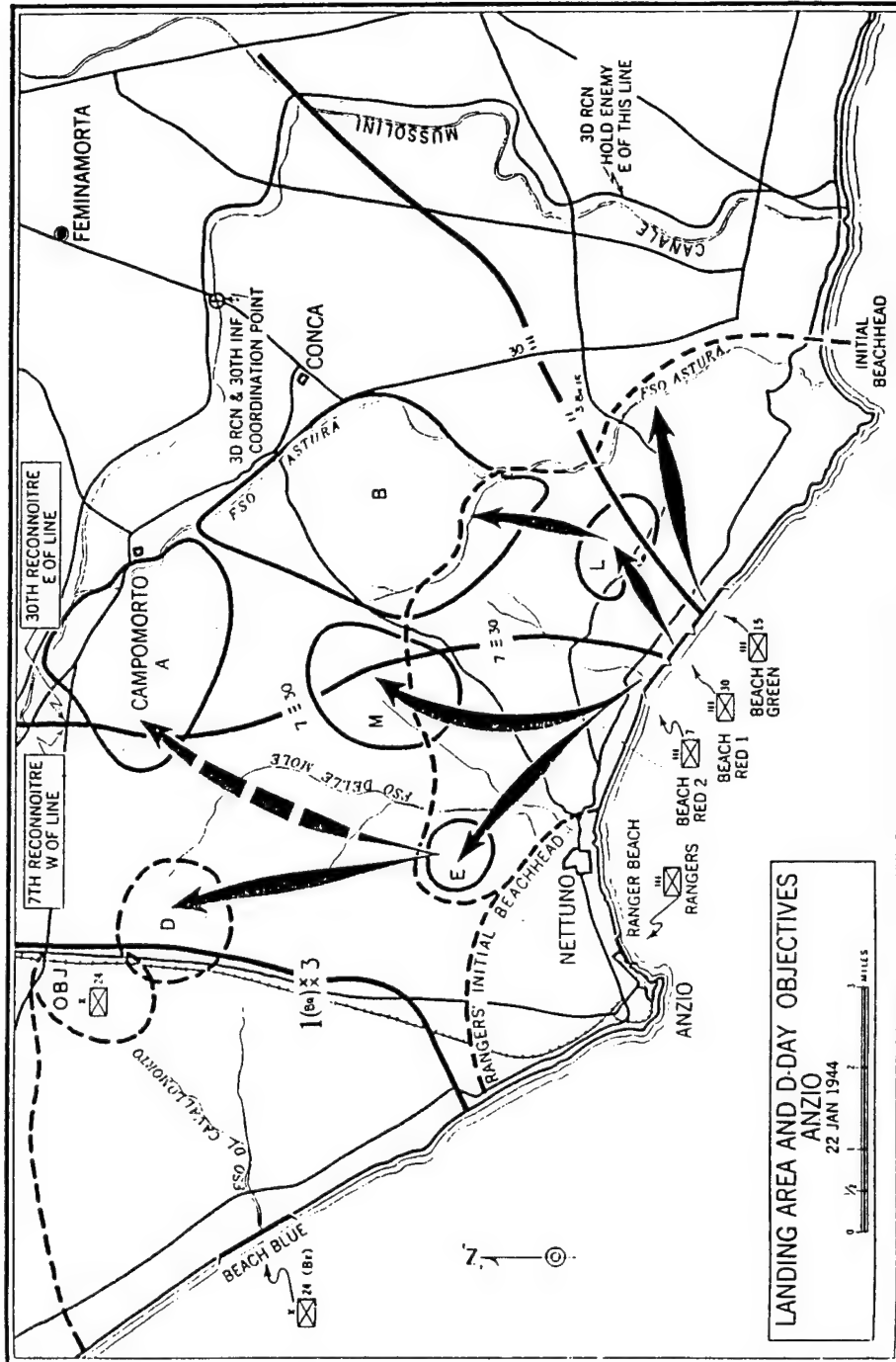
Map 8. Reprinted, by permission, from "The German Operation at Anzio from 22 Jan 44 to 31 May 44," map between pages 4 & 5.



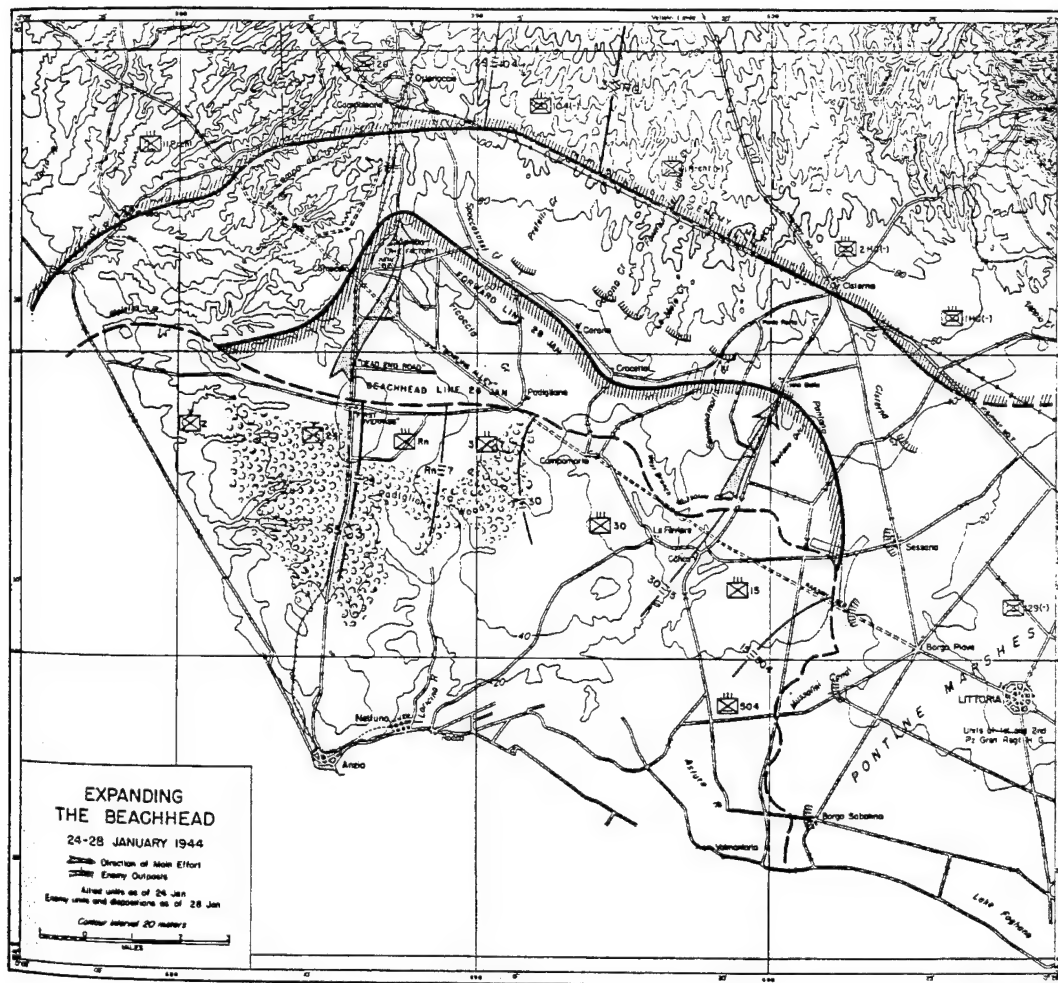
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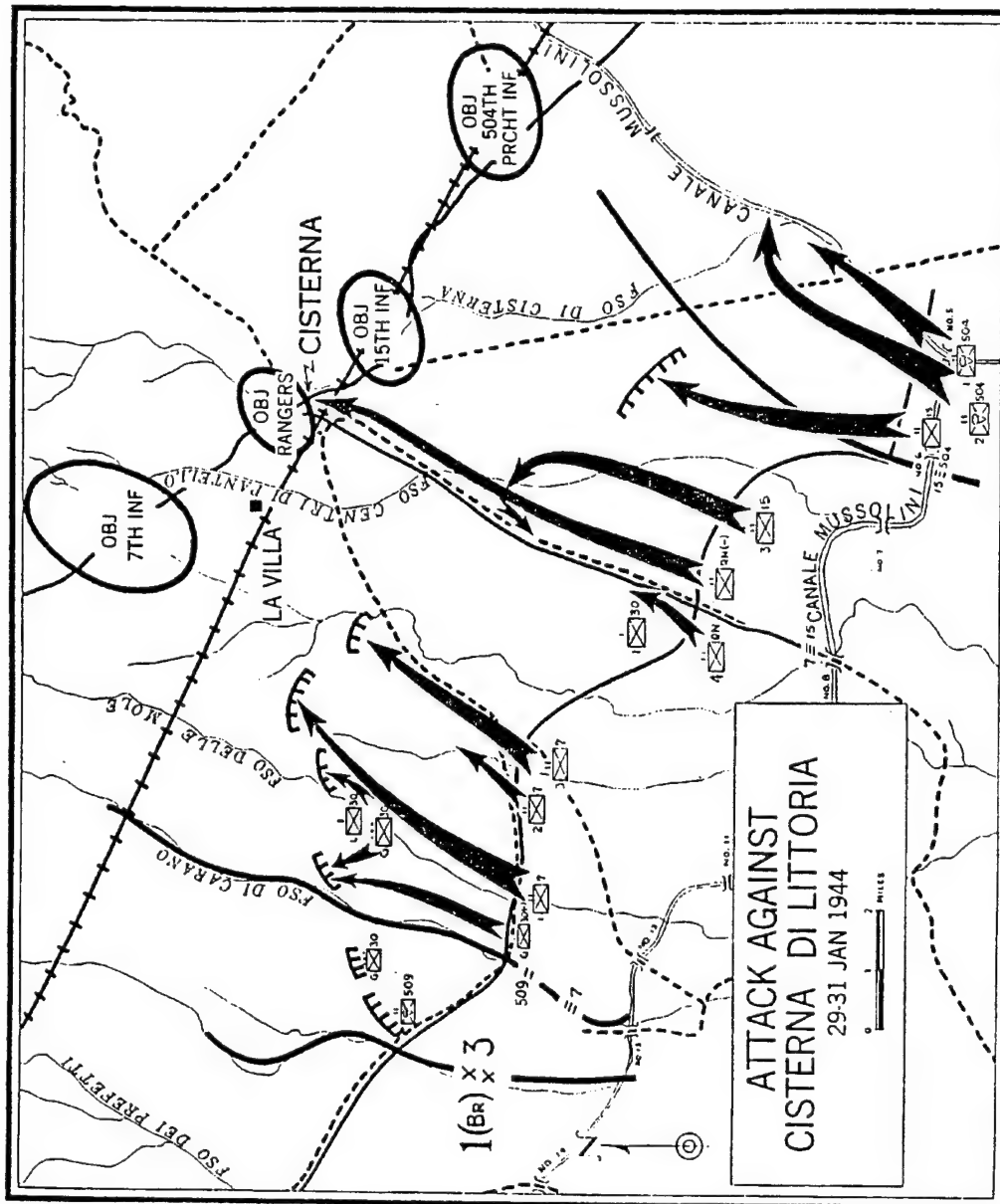
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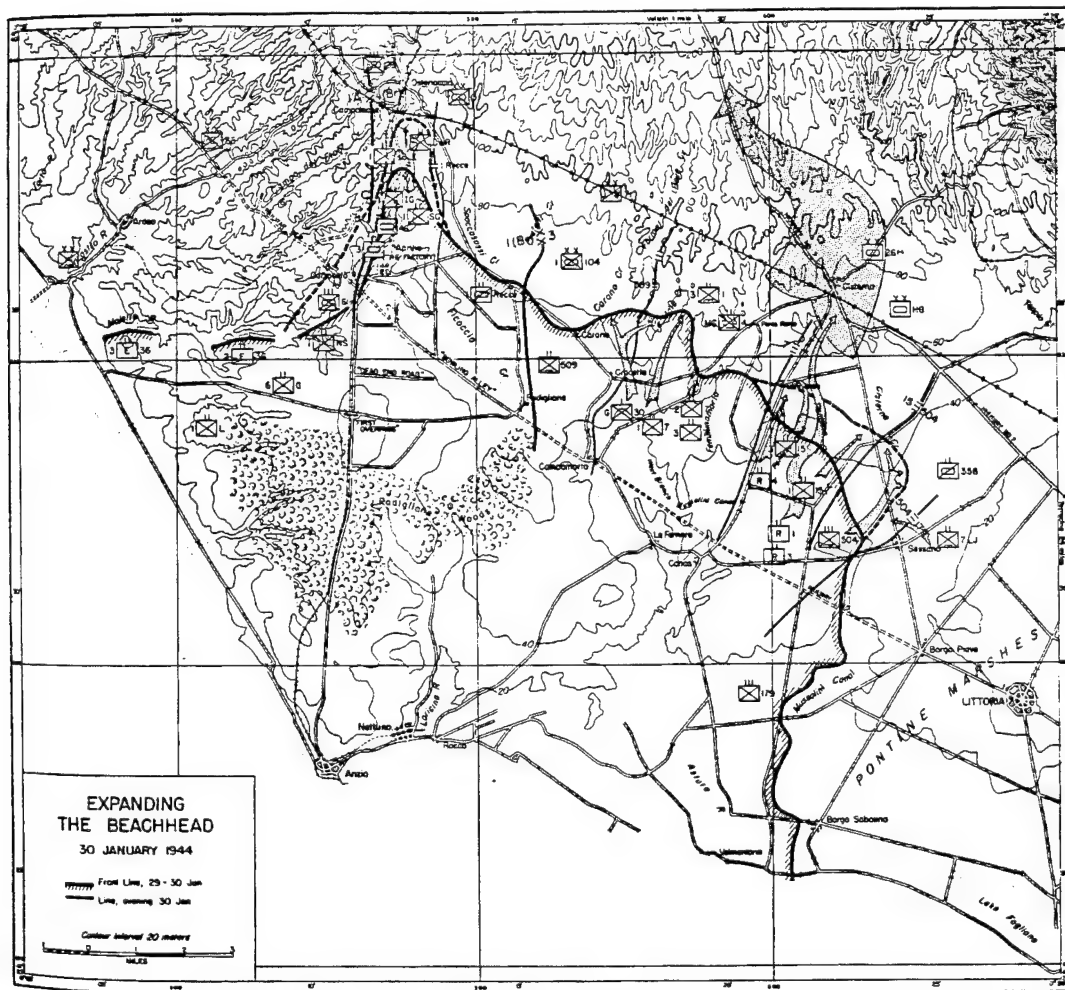
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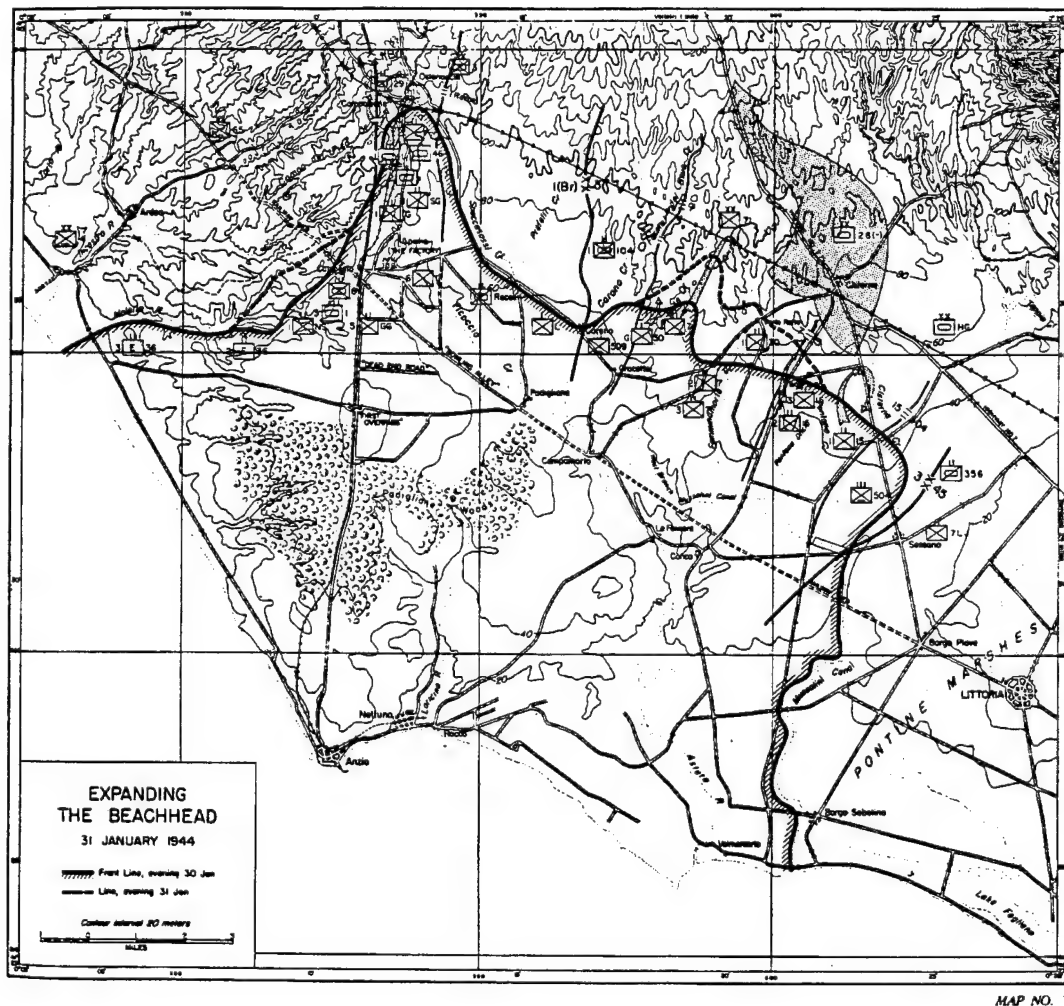
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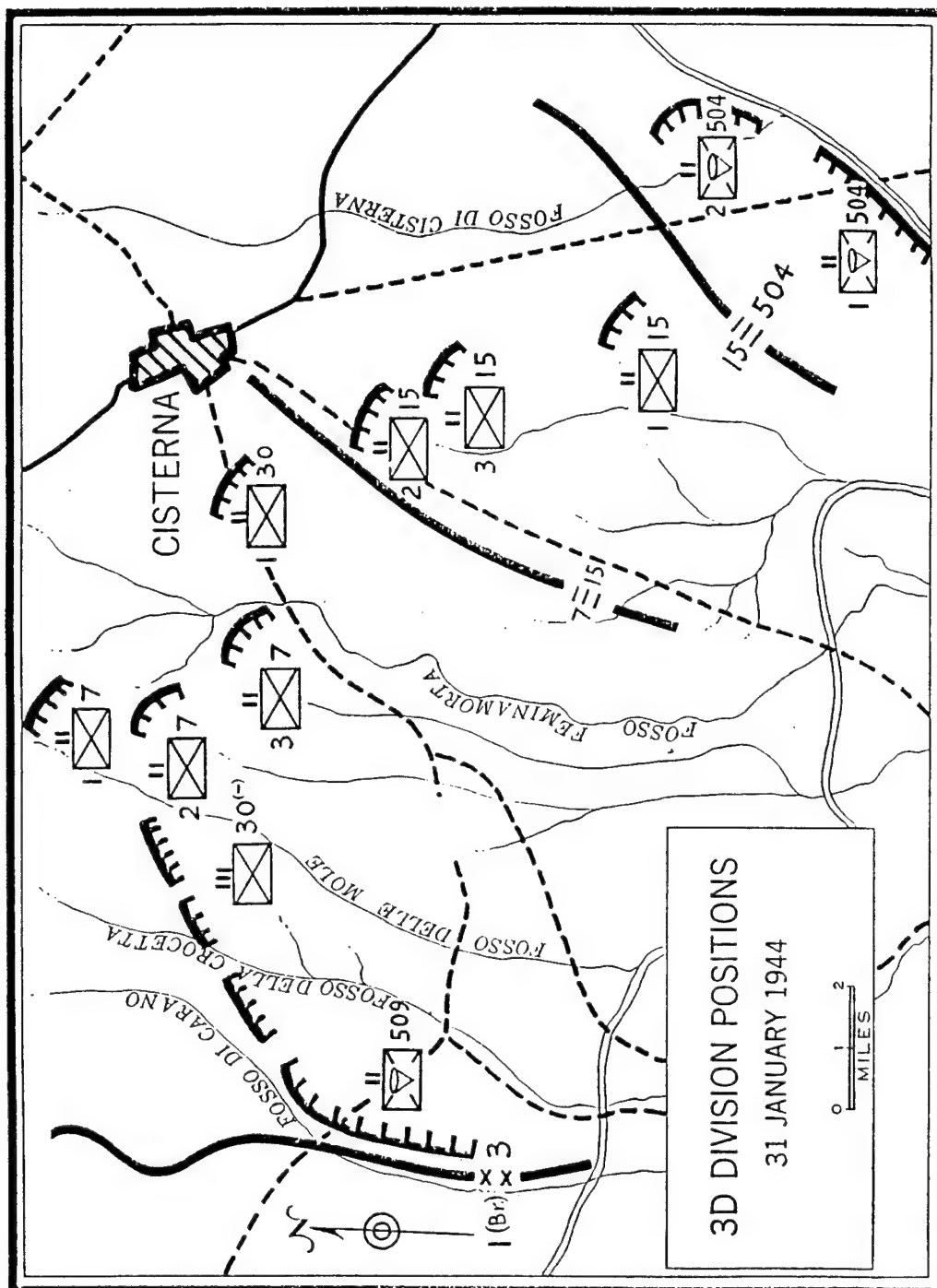
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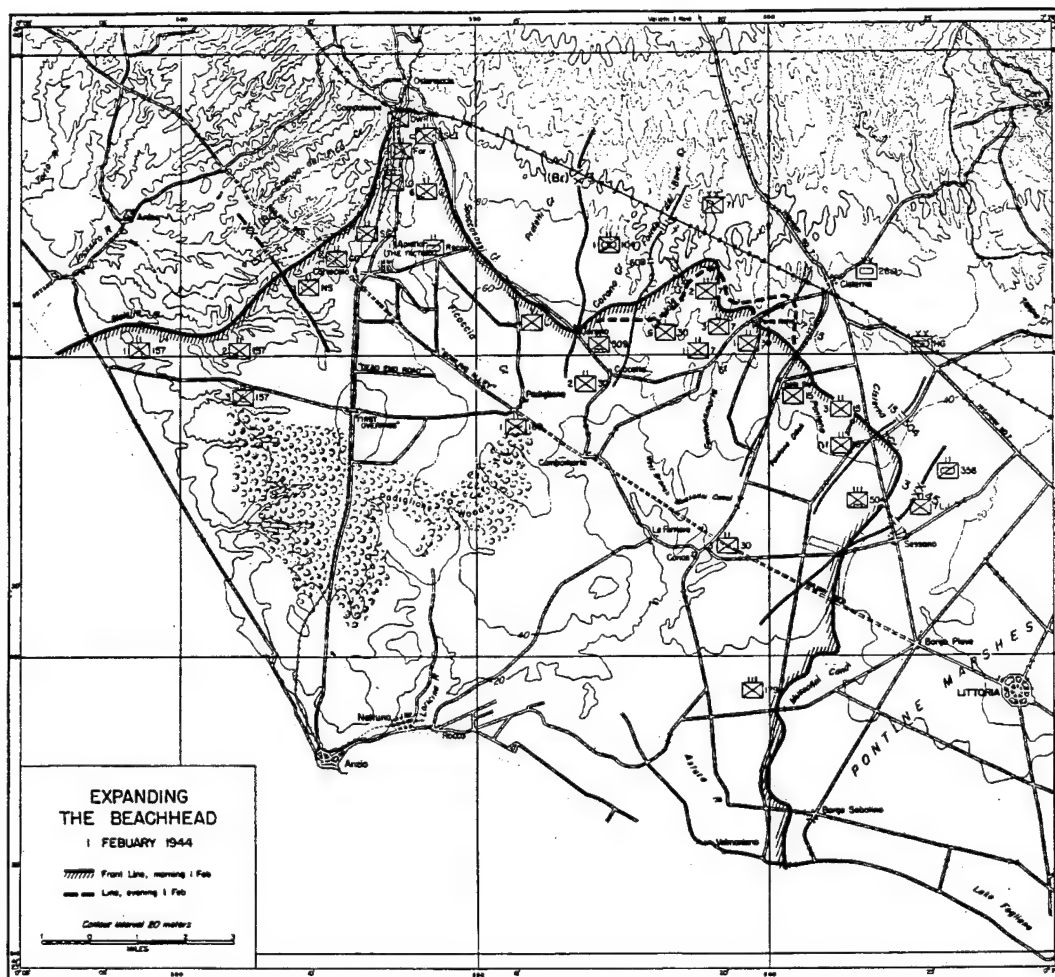
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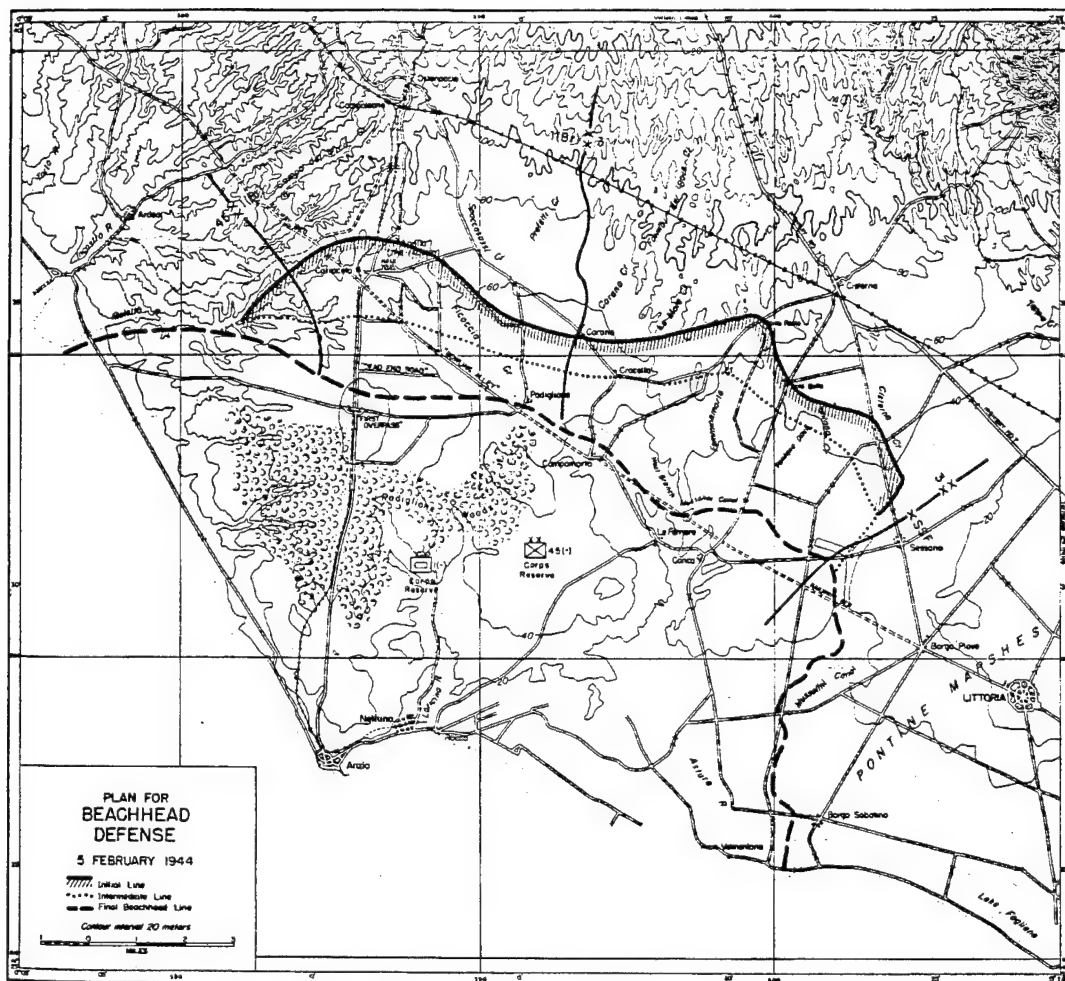
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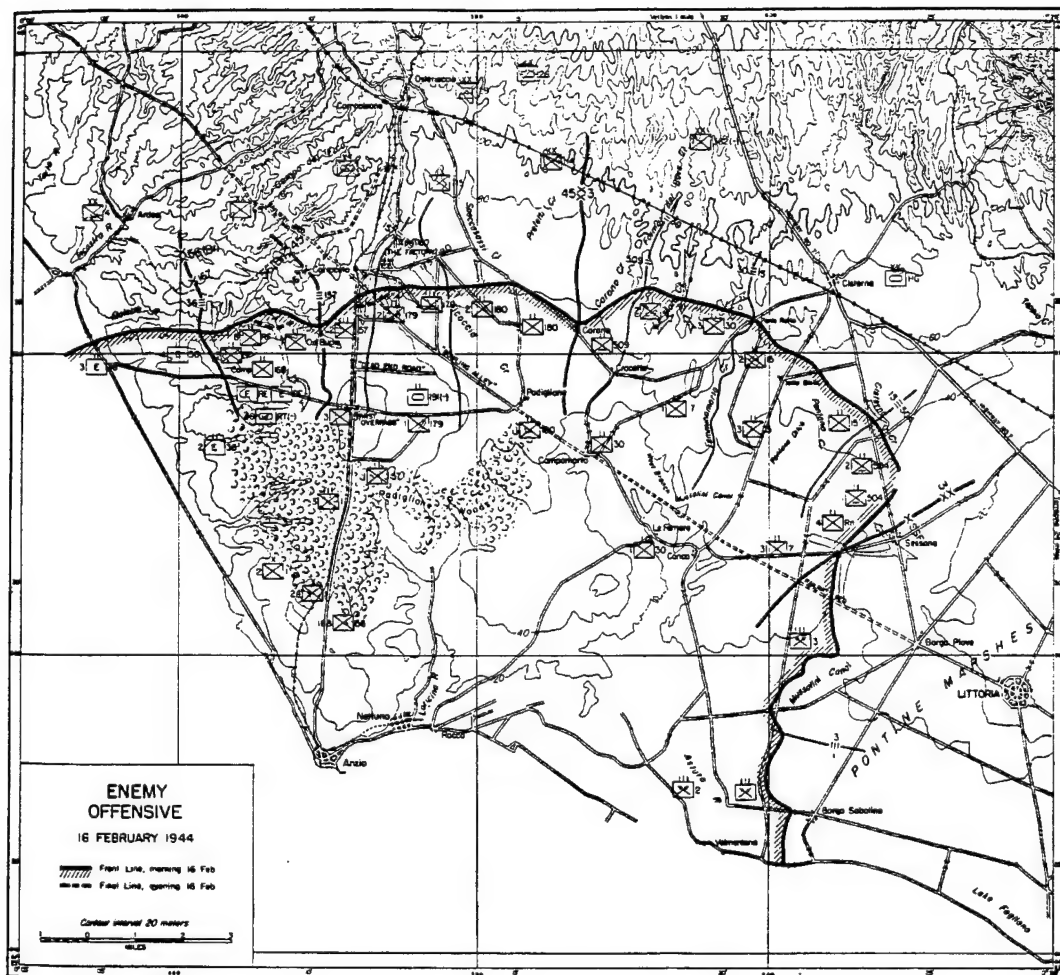
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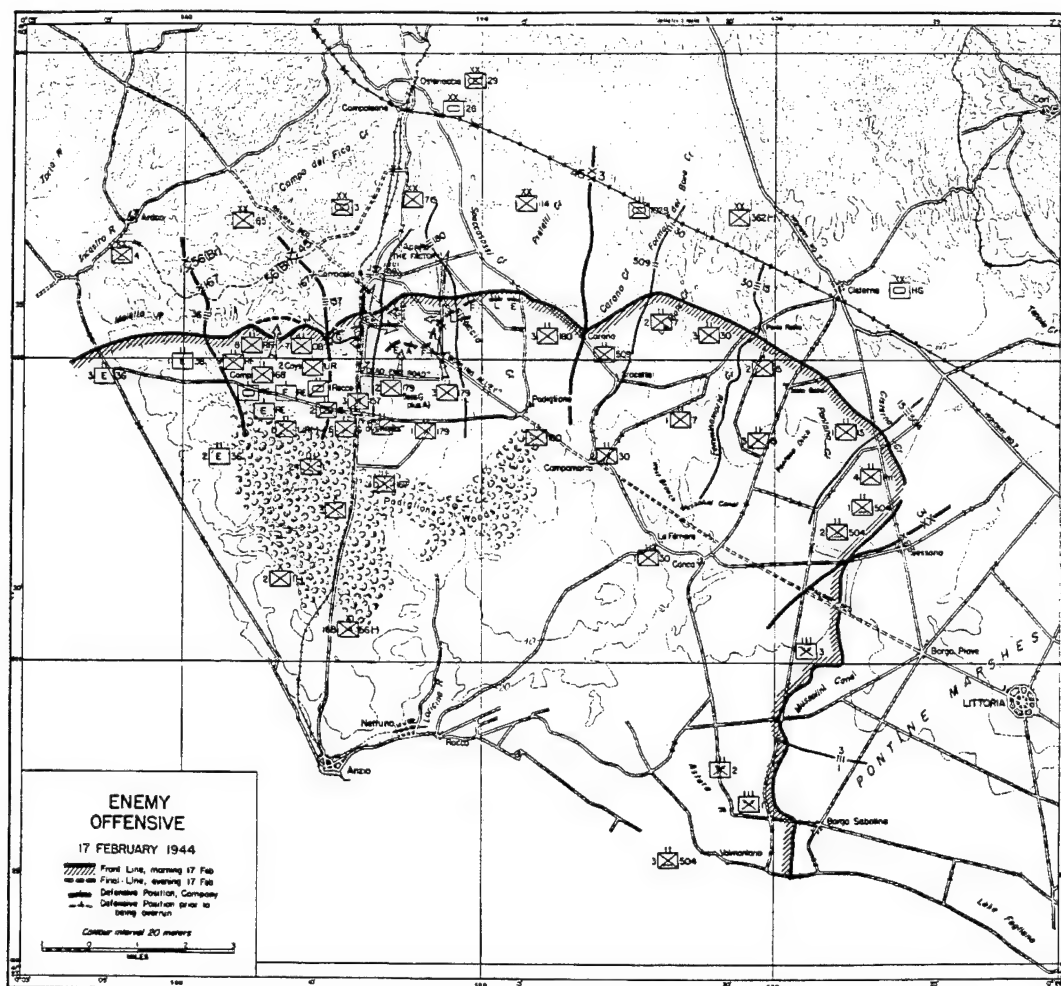


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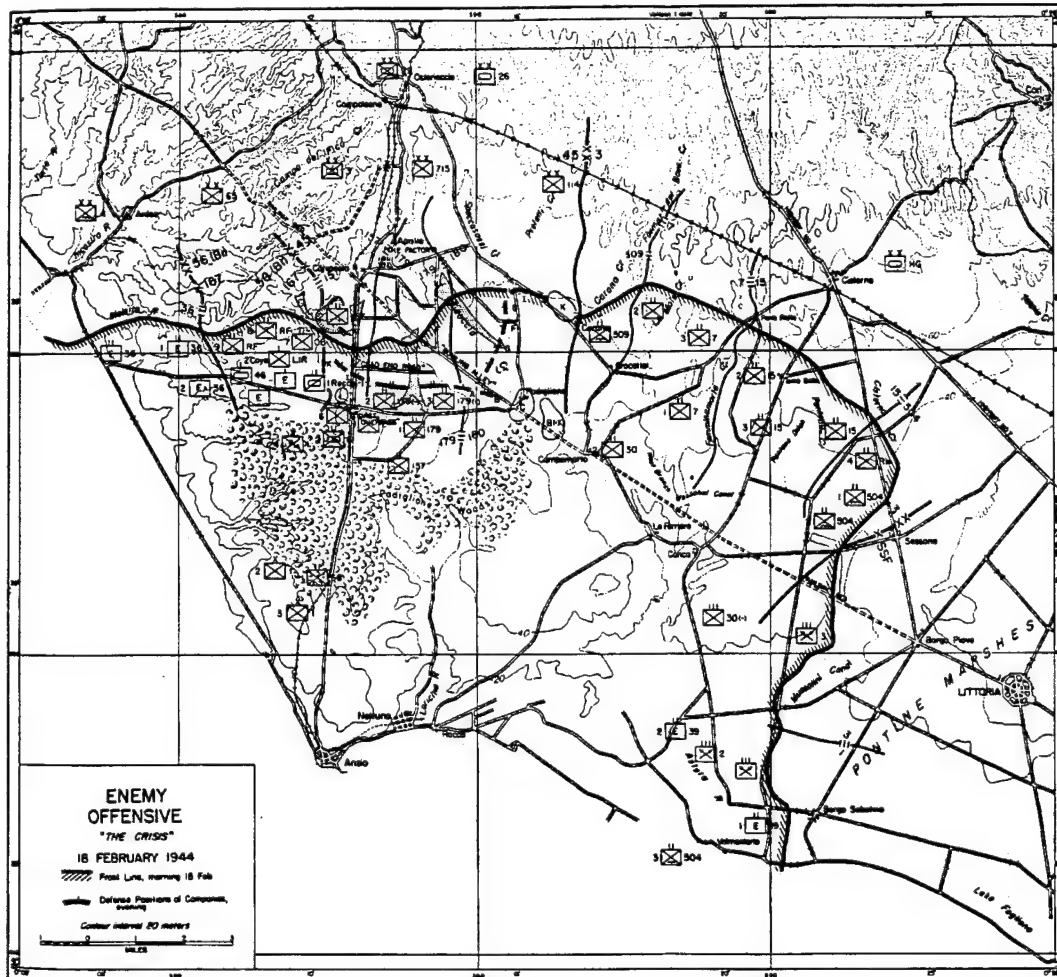


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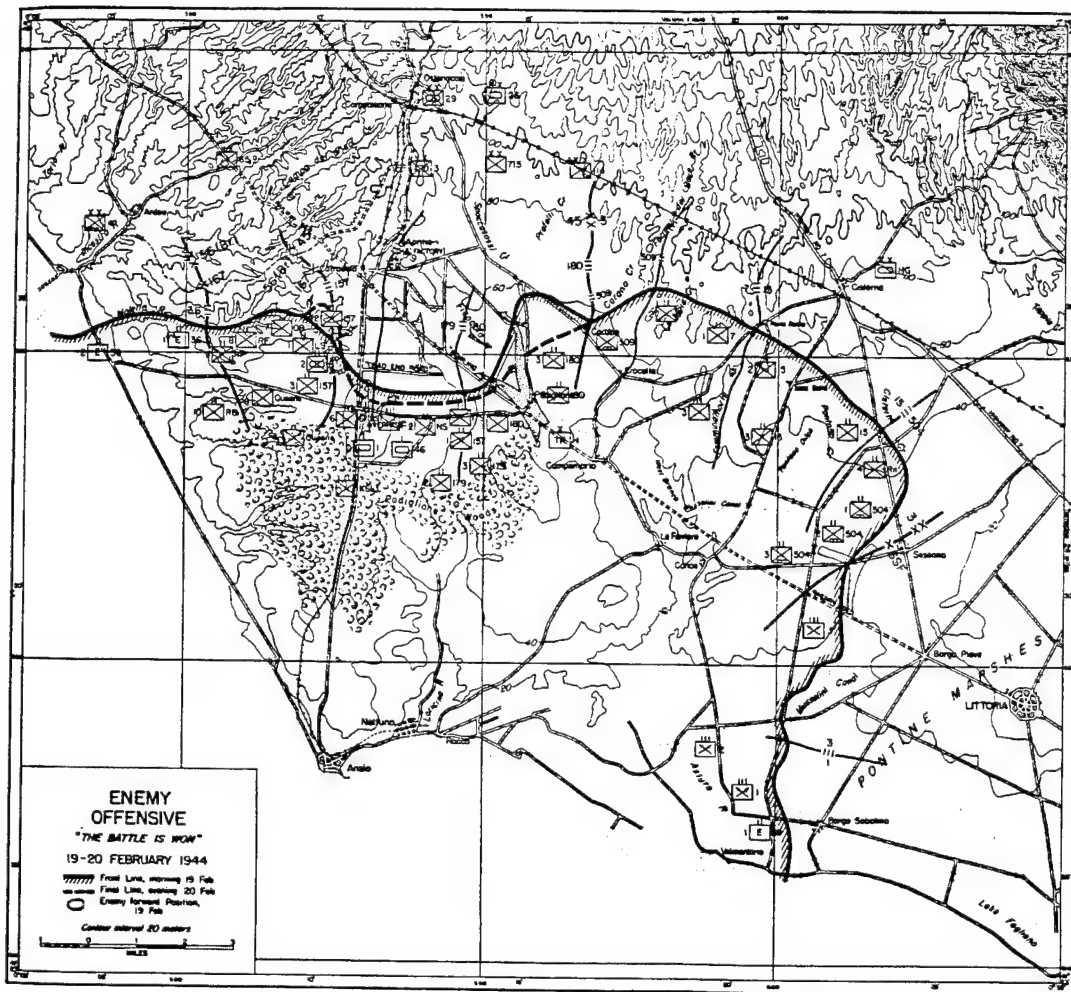
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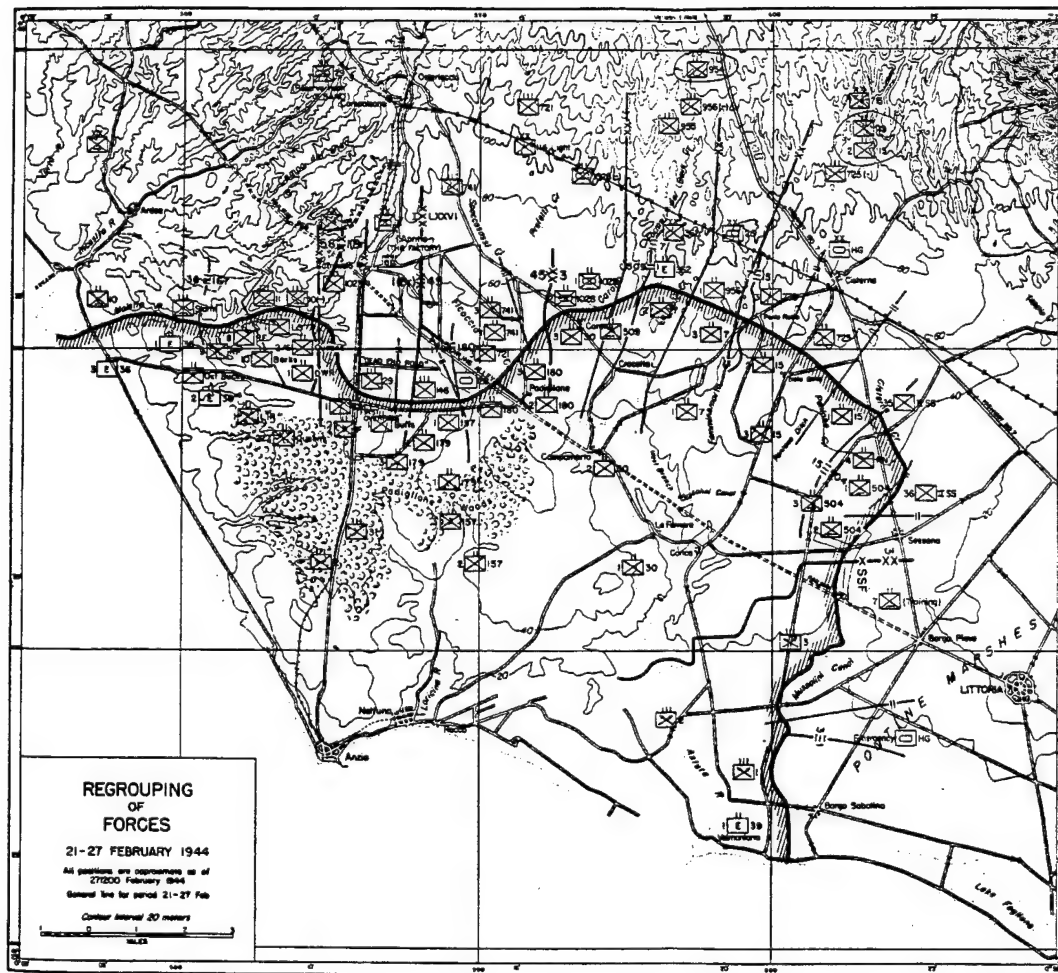
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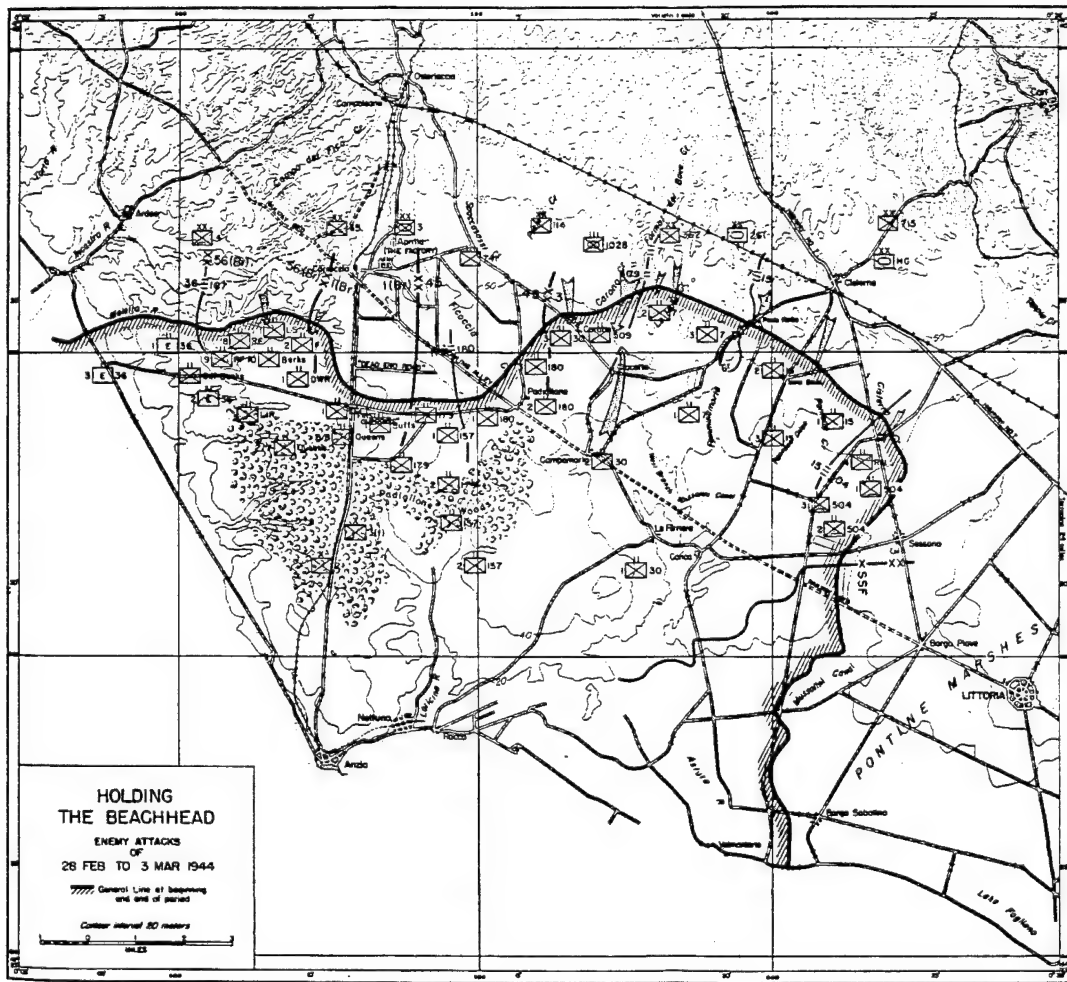
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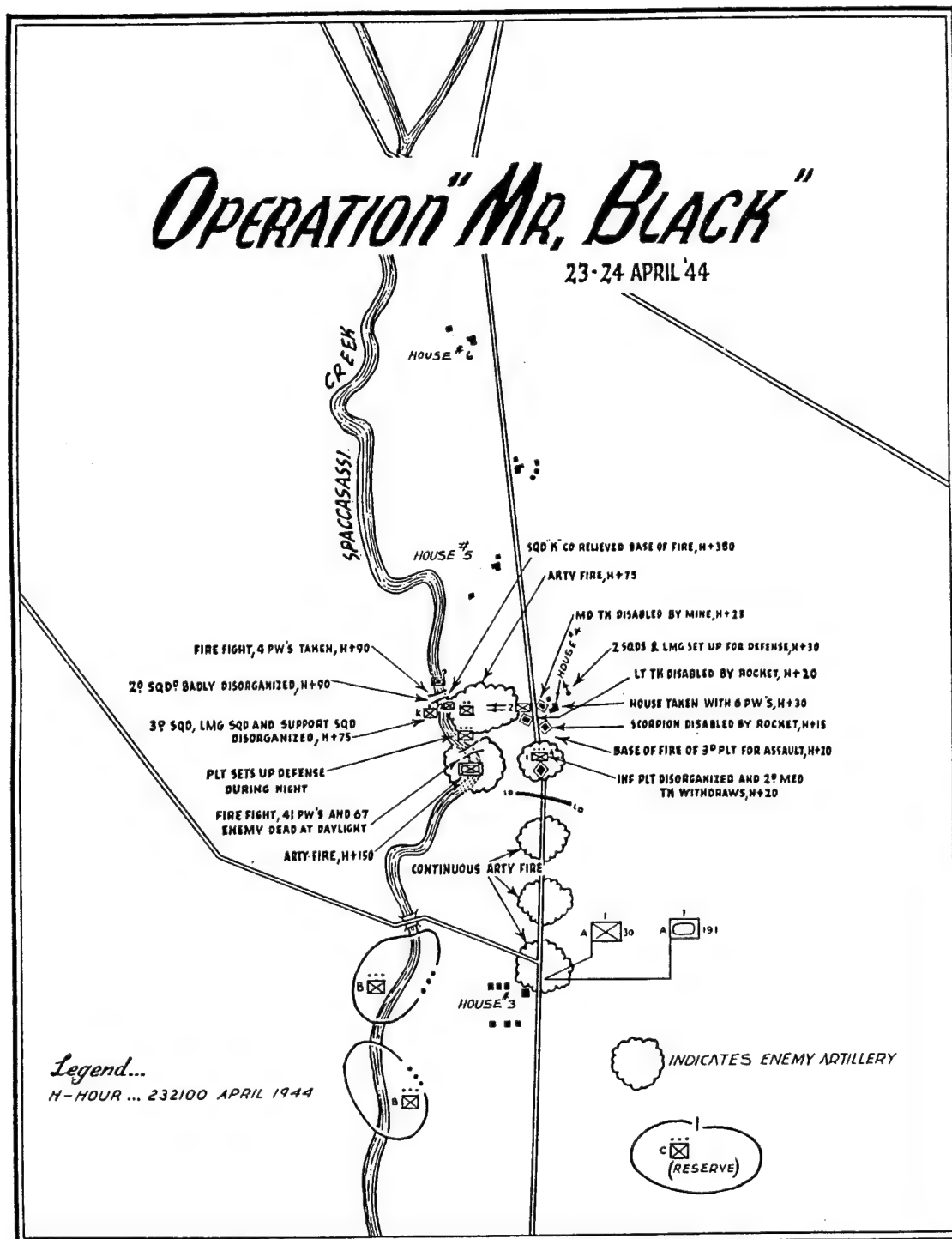
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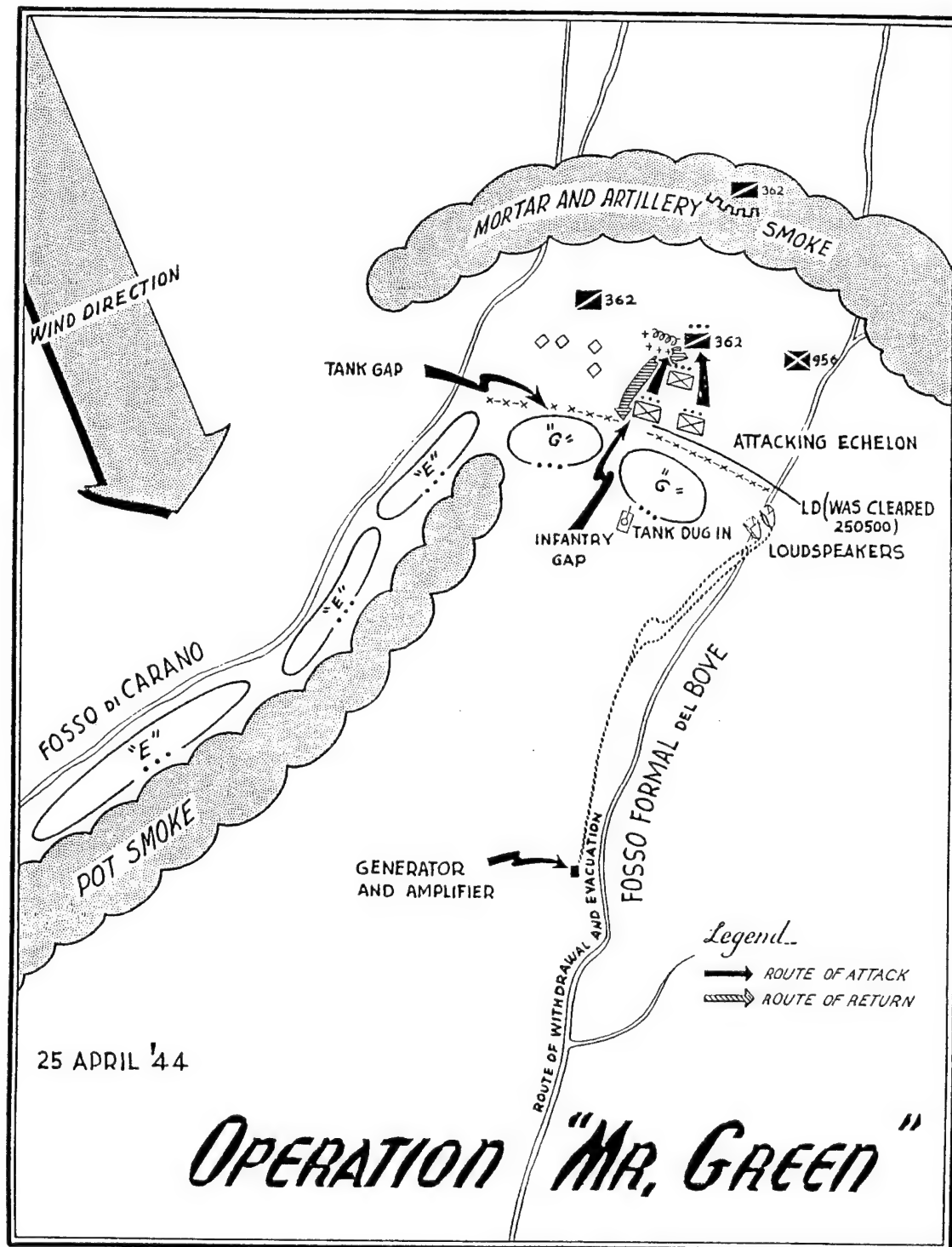
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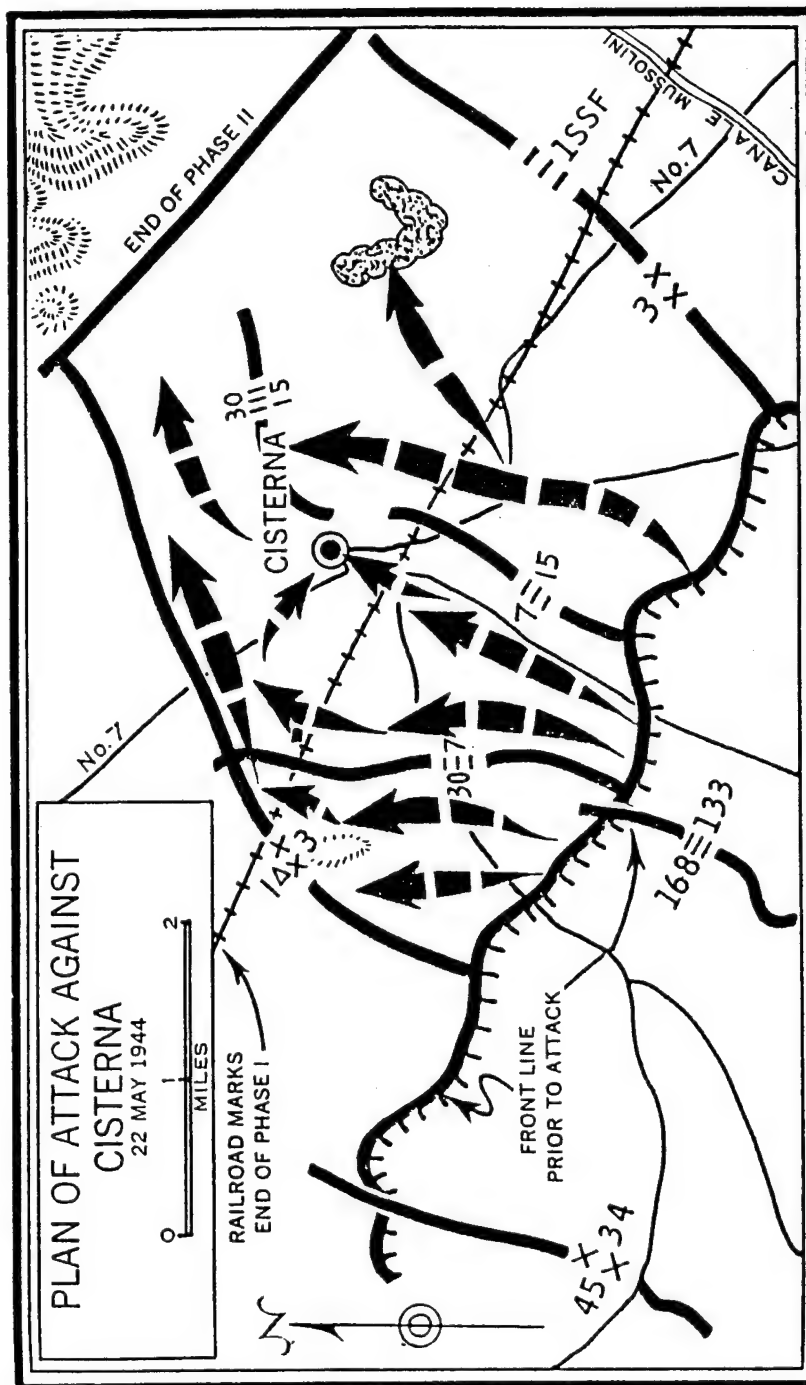
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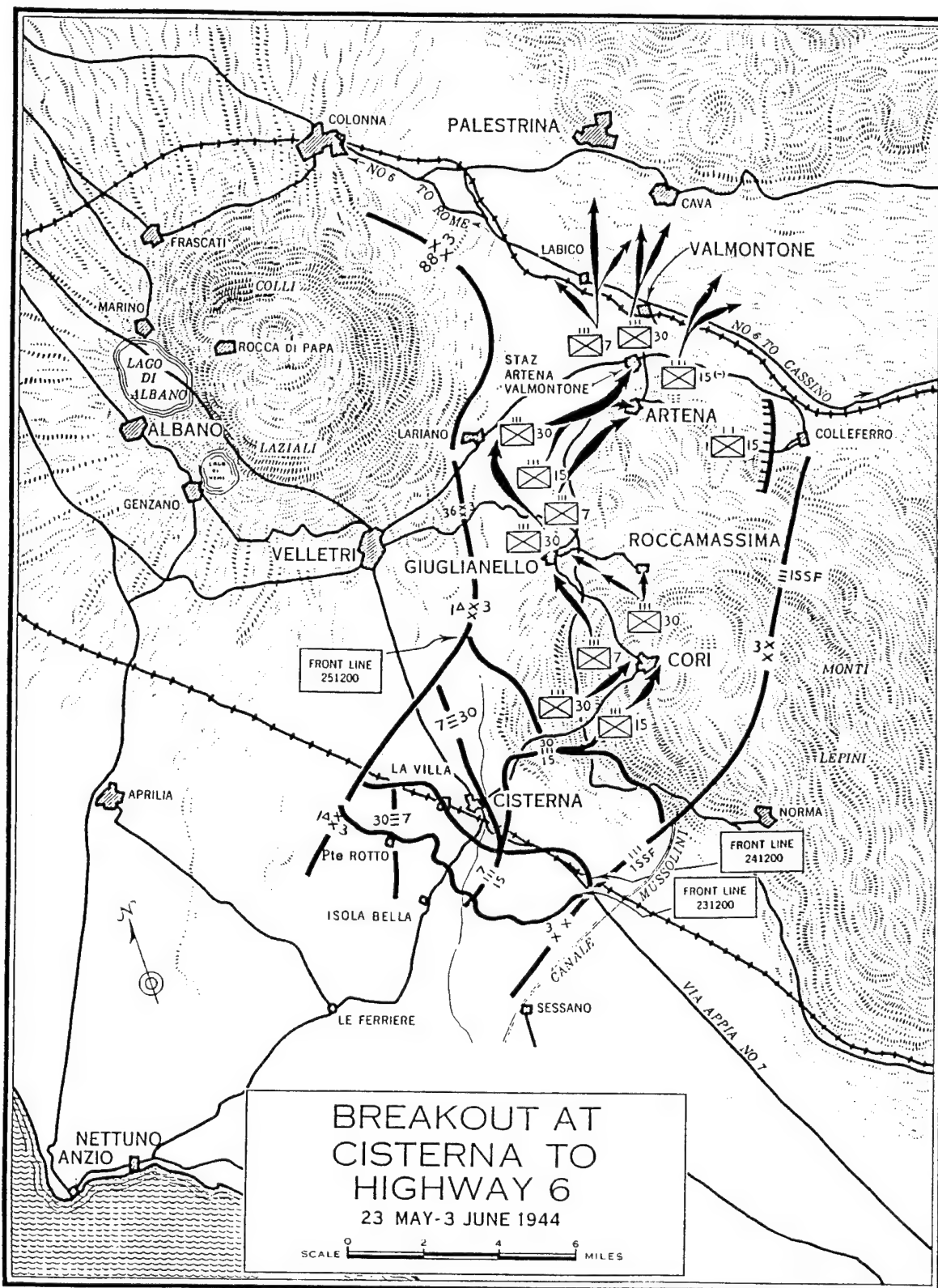
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